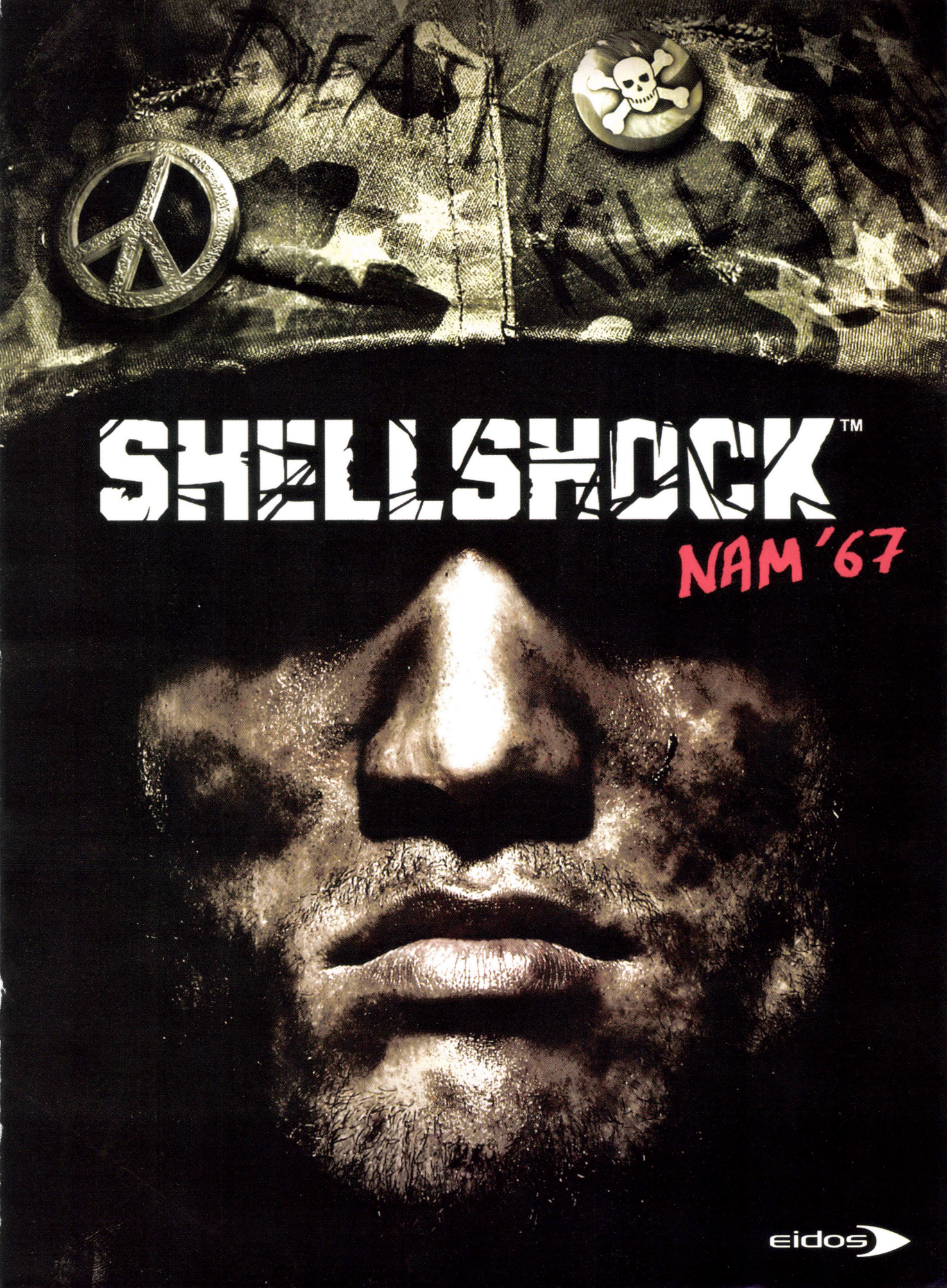
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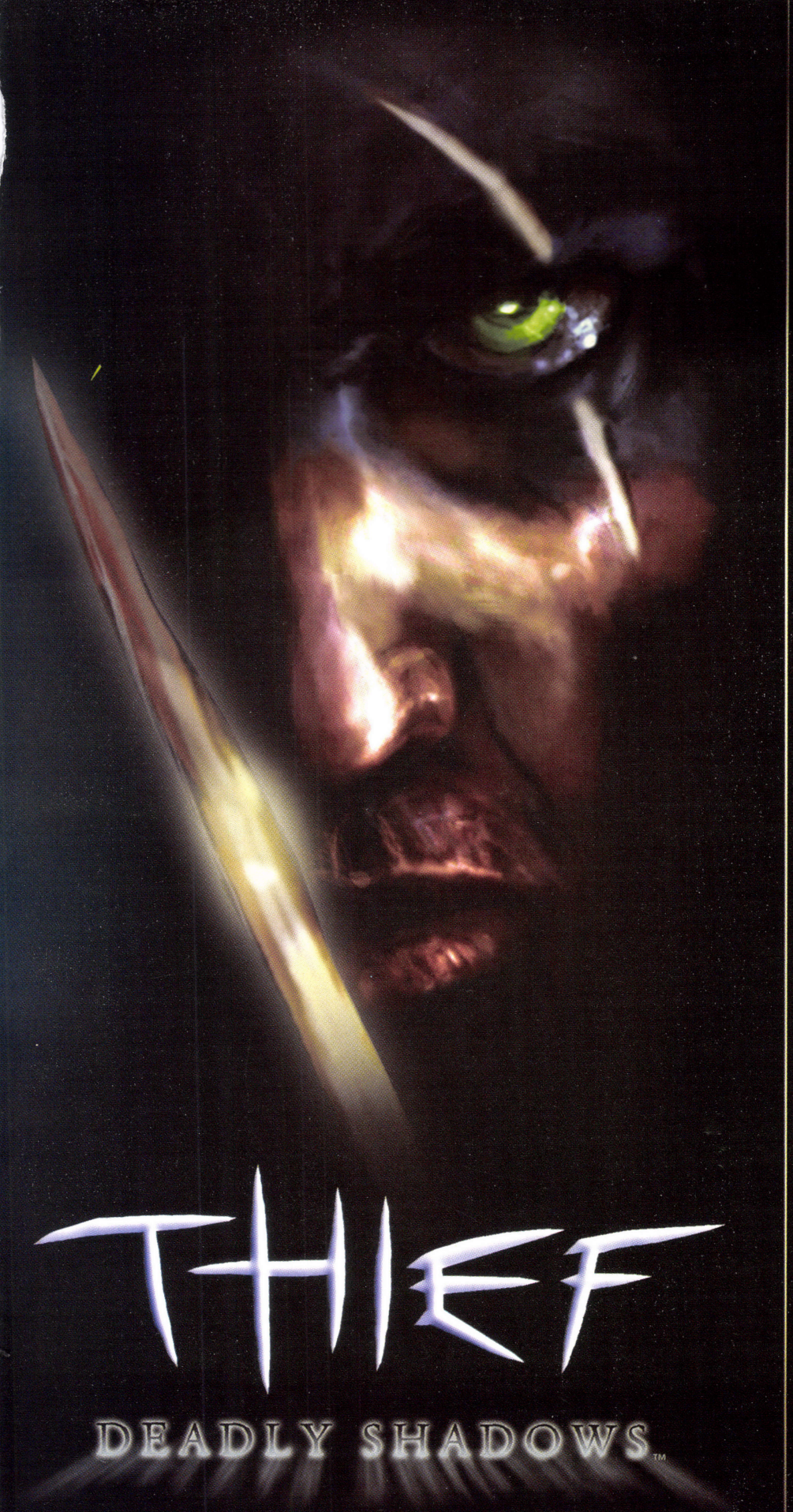

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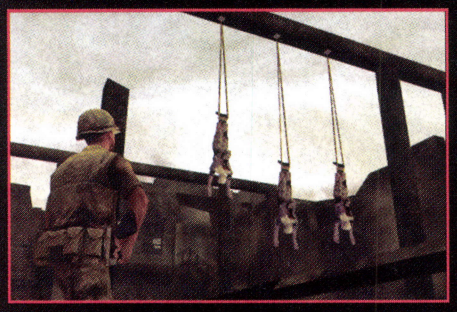

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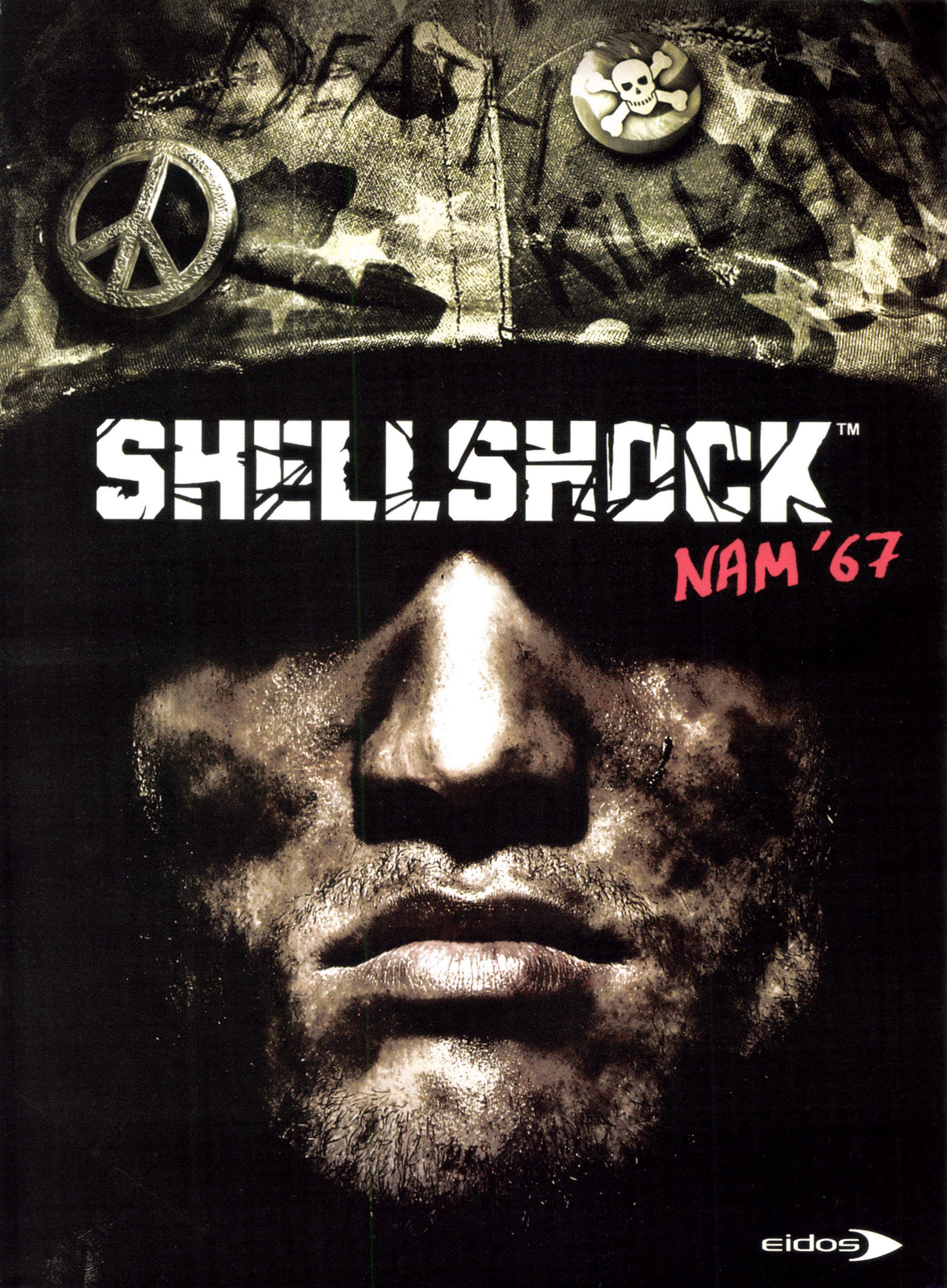
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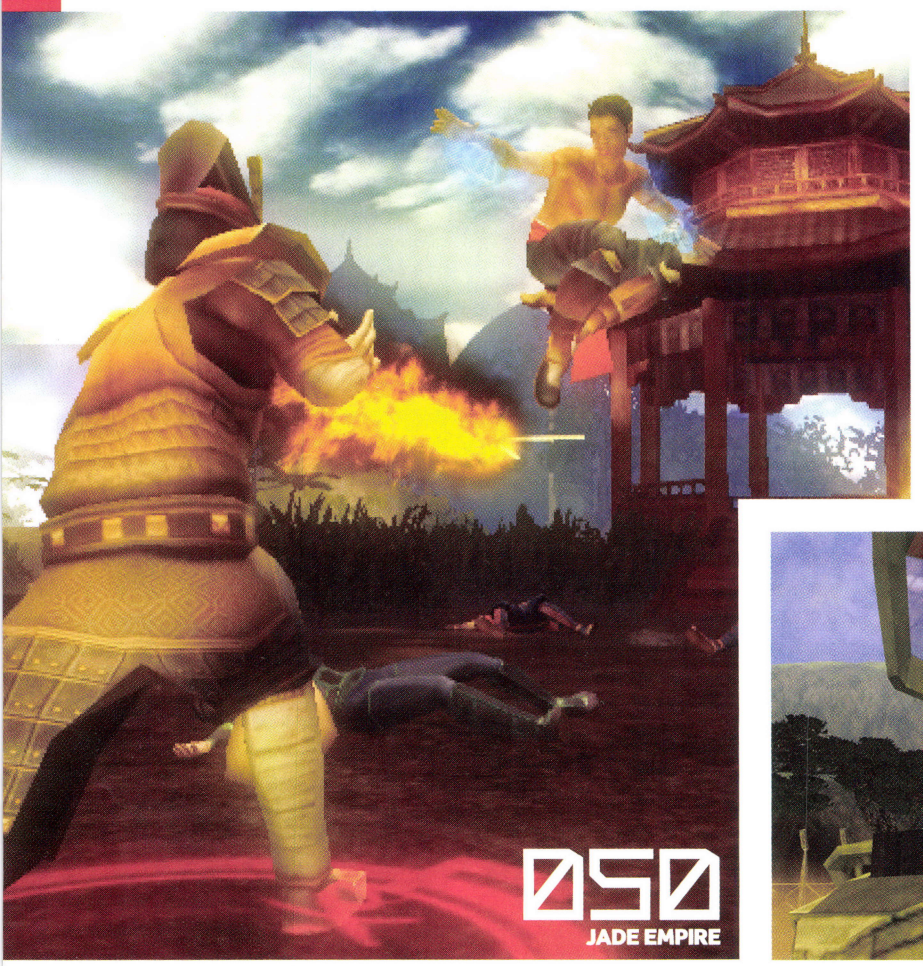

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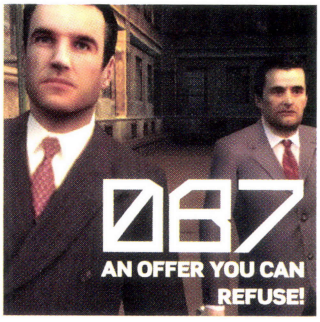

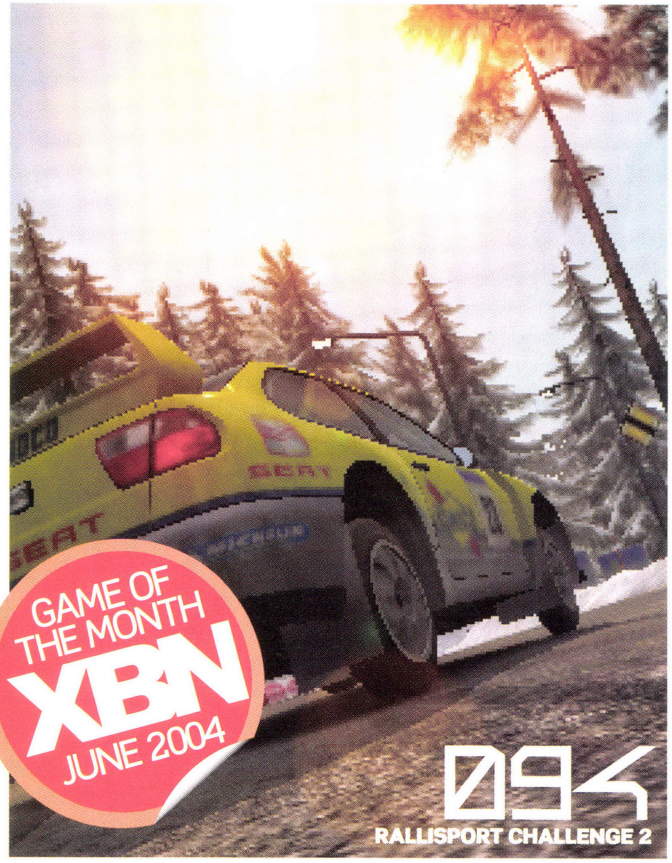

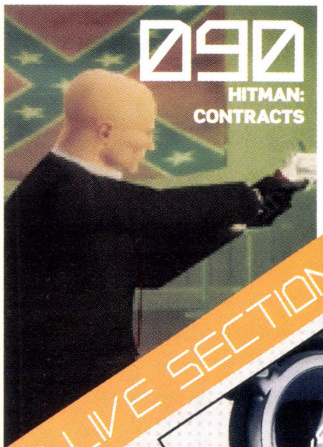

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The best of the best, Xbox style

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Next month in *XBN*

A BOX APART

The Xbox is widening the graphics gap

Xbox Nation is not known for bashing other consoles. It's a ridiculous pastime that ignores the fact that many of you own multiple systems. However, it has not gone unnoticed that the gap between the in-game graphics of Xbox titles and certain other systems is now becoming a gaping chasm. Vivendi/Starbreeze Studios' production *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* has not just set the bar higher than any other game before it, but it has taken that bar, textured it, bump-mapped it, normal-mapped it, and attached it to an equally rendered space station floating high above all the other bars. In space. Games developed first (or only) for Xbox are delivering levels of realism that others can only dream of.

XBN now has to ask: How much better can it get? For some answers, turn to our feature on page 28. Or just take a look at the stunning vistas and detailed characters of *Jade Empire*—our exclusive hands-on feature is on page 50. And let's not forget that by the time you read this, the Electronic Entertainment Expo 2004 will have happened. You may already know the answers to the burning questions that occurred to us as we put this issue to bed. Will Microsoft announce Xbox Next? Will *Halo 2* be playable online on the show floor? And will the *Dead or Alive* girls, in the wake of the Janet Super Bowl incident, be appearing dressed in hermetically sealed, lead-lined bags?

We'll bring you the full scoop next issue, of course. Bags or no.

—Simon Cox, Editor-in-Chief

Who's who on *XBN*

SIMON COX
Seraph

Former *Xbox Nation* editor and Earl of the English village Lower Scruddington on Piddle died yesterday of blimp-related complications. Coroners have yet to recover Cox's body but predict they'll find a handsome corpse that, even partially decomposed, will make the girls clutch at their bosoms and sigh longingly. In lieu of donations, please send first-person shooters with boffo bump-mapping.

EVAN SHAMOON
Cherub

The world mourned yesterday as amateur neurosurgeon and children's entertainer Evan Shamoon died tragically when the Acme Rocket Pack™ he was wearing on his back mysteriously sputtered, restarted, and then stopped working over the Grand Canyon. He is survived by Pepito, formerly the World's Happiest Sock Puppet.

DAVID CHEN
Power

Heed well this warning from noted safety specialist David "Safety" Chen: If you decide you want toast while you're taking a bath, do not plug the toaster in to an electronic socket and take it with you into the bathtub. Nor should you go up to a band of street toughs and tell them they're as smooth as powdered dandies—just like David "Safety" Chen, may he rest in peace.

CHE CHOU
Domination

Che Chou, enlightened emperor of Eastern Grambia, beloved by his subjects for the abolishment of whippings and subsequent replacement with scaldings as punishment for treasonous behavior including jaywalking, lollygagging, and impertinence, died last week by exploding. His passing marks the end of a brand-new era of good feelings and the return of police-issued brutalities as national policy.

ANDREW MENDOZA
Angel

Andrew Mendoza, love child of wrestler Captain Lou Albano and exotic dancer Tushy LeFemme, recently saw his screen flash "Game Over," if you understand the subtle innuendo. The subject of no less than eight epic poems and two Make Your Own Sno-Cone kits, Mendoza, an artist of some renown, helped scientists verify the whole "no head, no live" theory.

CINDY LUM
Principality

In an ironic twist, rock star Cindy "Bloody Cindy" Lum died peacefully in her sleep of old age and was tastefully buried with her millions, 22 cats, six hunky manservants of virtue pure, the entire *Where's Waldo?* book series, and a solid-gold statue of fat Elvis Presley having his kingly brow mopped of sweat by an obese housewife.

ANDREW BURWELL
Archangel

Humanitarian and animal lover Andrew Burwell died when the dogs he fought so valiantly to let out consumed him in a rabid frenzy. He will be mourned by all freethinking men and women under the sun, PETA, and the assembled members of *Xbox Nation*, who always believed him to be "the ginchiest."

GREG ORLANDO
Throne

Greg Orlando, famous for once pointing out that if your mother had wings, she'd be a Boeing 747, is missing and presumed wearing cement shoes at the bottom of a lake somewhere.

XBN

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LETTERS JUNE 2004

"I know. It's my aftershave, isn't it?"

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Boll Breakers

In the Xpress section of issue #13, director Uwe Boll was trounced for "having ruined such properties as *House of the Dead* and *Alone in the Dark*." Unless you've been able to get an advance screening of the *Alone in the Dark* movie, why not give it a chance first before denouncing it? Admittedly, Boll's first effort—*House of the Dead*—wasn't the most spectacular, but personally, I enjoyed it for the mindless fun.

There's always a chance that Boll's second movie (or other future titles) might not be all that bad. Everyone is, of course, entitled to his own opinion, but I just wanted to put my two cents in about prejudgments.

Kurt Stegall

Fun fact: Director Uwe Boll frisked people—ostensibly for cameras—entering the theater during the screening of his *House of the Dead* movie at last year's San Francisco Film Festival.

And the assembled members of this *Xbox Nation* agree that Uwe Boll's next may well be very good. That is what we would say if it were Backward Day, or we were all complete liars (or perhaps injected with some antitruth serum).

KEYBOARD KRAZY

I am a hardcore PC gamer. I also own an Xbox. I play online first-person shooters (*Battlefield 1942*, *Unreal Tournament*, etc.) and am online more hours than my wife would like. As for Xbox, I play it approximately 10 to 20 hours per week. But let me tell you, I refuse to buy another FPS for Xbox until someone comes out with a mouse/keyboard combo.

Tell me why Microsoft will not try something like that for Xbox. You see, I go to LAN parties every month and hear the same complaint from other PC gamers. Just think how many PC gamers it could convert with a simple controller design.

Real gamers do it with two hands and 10 fingers, not just two thumbs.

Thumb-tied Steve
High Point, NC

Actually, real gamers plot intricate deaths for fake gamers who make "real gamers do it" jokes.

Oh, we forwarded your letter to Microsoft for this response: "Developers and publishers of games are ultimately the decision makers when it comes to supporting external hardware in their games. It is their decision whether or not to support devices other than the standard gamepad in their products, such as the 40-button controller for *Steel Battalion* or the dance pad for *Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix*. Currently, there are no plans to distribute an official Xbox-branded keyboard for use on the Xbox console."

STOP! HAMMER TIME!

I'm sure most of you there with Live will no doubt be aware of the host of goodies Ubisoft has been treating us loyal *Rainbow Six 3* players to, from maps to...well, maps. Yeah, so maybe we haven't received too much, but it's enough to keep me playing this brilliant shooter.

My question involves the latest map release from Ubisoft, the meat-packing company, which can be played through team survival and survival modes. I had been running around in the meat-packing company for three hours, bored out of my skull. I looked up at the red spawn and there happened to be a clock. I immediately blurted out, "Hey, guys! It's 12:25!" Well, apparently my colleague didn't think so, so he proceeded to tell me that it was, in fact, 5:03. Throwing in the occasional "Mom" insult here and there, we couldn't decide what time it was.

I just wanted to see what you guys thought, especially Greg Orlando, because he's sexy.

Oh, and you guys want to get owned hardcore *Rainbow Six 3* style, go ahead and add my gamertag: Chinchalinchin.

Grant Moore

It's time to start using the glue the way God intended it to be used, Grant Moore.

NAKED CAME I

I would like to see *N.U.D.E.@* come to the United States. I would like to have a game I can talk to instead of my wife. I wonder why she's jealous of my Xbox.

Richard Hamilton

Let us be the first humans to introduce you to the phrase, "Talk to my lawyer." Also, "I want half."

FANTASTIC, THEN

The game I so want to play on my Xbox is *Final Fantasy*. When will Xbox get its own *Final Fantasy*? Sure, *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* was a good RPG, but it's not *Final Fantasy*, and Xbox has nothing on its level. I've even considered buying a PlayStation 2 just for some good old *FF* action, but financial burdens restrict me from getting one.

I was wondering if you gentlemen at *XBN* could shed some light on Sony's deal with Square Enix. Will they ever allow *Final Fantasy* to hit Xbox? Maybe port some of the old games, sort of like what Rockstar did? I personally think they should remake all the

"I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE A GAME I CAN TALK TO INSTEAD OF MY WIFE. I WONDER WHY SHE'S JEALOUS OF MY XBOX."

old-school *Fantasy* games and throw 'em to Xbox, but that's my own little fantasy. Let's just hope that *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* isn't a PS2-only compatible DVD. I will have to go on a rampage.
Kyle "Nuclear" Wessels

Square's official policy is that it has no plans to make a *Final Fantasy* game for Xbox. Also, we added a cool nickname for you so everyone will think you're tough.

DELAYED REACTION

The reason for my e-mail is to see if you can give me any better insight than what I am getting from my work. I am currently an employee at Electronics Boutique (EB Games) in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and the delays for Xbox games are driving me insane.

At work I find myself being hounded by annoying customers wanting to know the release date of their game of choice. I then tell them the newly dated release, and they begin to explain their hatred for me and the new date. There isn't a day that goes by that I don't have some customer ask me, "Why are these games pushed back?" My response is simple: "I don't have a clue...NOT A CLUE!" I love how people presume EB workers know all and see all about games.

These delays are driving me nuts. I love how these games are being developed and how amazing they will be, but will they ever arrive? I'm seeing a lot of amazing first-person shooters and war sims, but every time I look at the dates, they change from January to March, March to July, July to September. I'm hoping you can give me some input as to why Xbox games are being pushed back.
Rob Hachey

Look at release dates as you would, say, your life. There is the hope that things will turn out OK, and then there is the reality that you'll likely end up old and bitter, writing for *Xbox Nation* and trying to lay traps for the neighborhood children who ring your doorbell and leave flaming bags of dog feces for you to stomp on. Put no faith in release dates, young Rob Hachey.

Actually, games are delayed for any number of reasons: economic, political, socioeconomic, and so forth. One time, our news editor came to work and proclaimed his pants were itchy, which caused the Xbox platformer *Malice* to be pushed back for six months.

EASILY PLEASED

I wrote you a few months ago and asked you to go monthly. You put my letter in your mag. Thank you for going monthly and putting me in your mag.
Tom Clark
Springfield, MO

CLONE WARS BORE

I was reading your last issue and I got to the article entitled "Shelf Help." I was very happy that someone out there finally decided to bring this problem to attention. There needs to be more innovation in the game industry, and what I don't understand is why, when an innovative game that introduces some new concepts, new forms of gameplay, or just a really creative story line (*Beyond Good & Evil* for example), people just don't want to try these kinds of games. It makes me angry to see a great game like *BG&E* not sell well because people have never heard of it and don't want to try it.

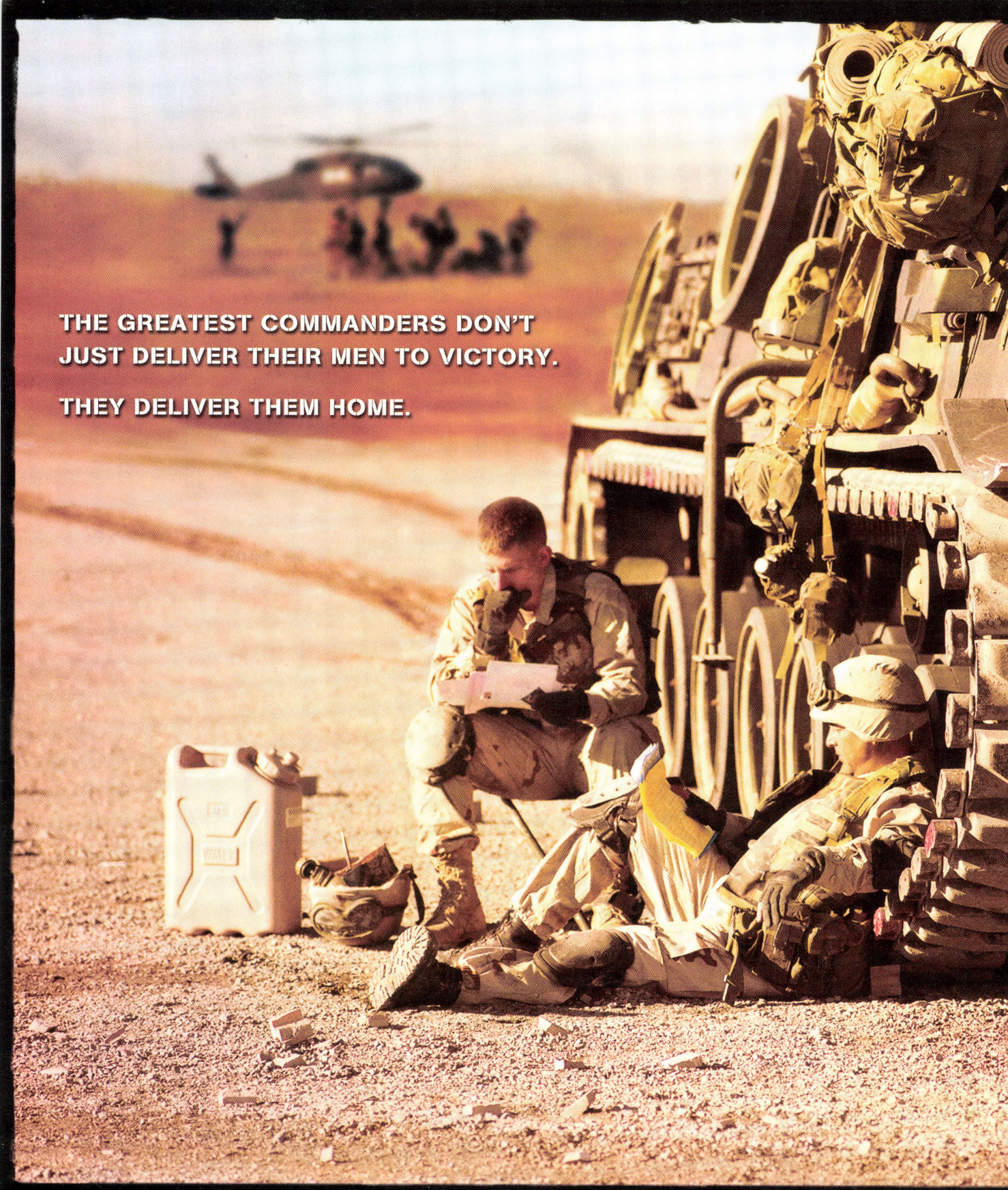
One game company that makes me extremely angry is EA Games. We hardly ever see anything innovative coming from them. It is always the same old sports games that get updated every year and the same old movie-licensed games (*James Bond 007*, *LOTR*). The only reason these games sell well is that people recognize the title. The game industry needs to somehow rid itself of these kinds of games and get some new, more innovative games on the shelves or else hardcore gamers will start to get bored of the same old games and the industry will lose customers.
Ken Zotara

There's room in the game industry, Ken Zotara, for both evolution and revolution, and in EA's defense, both *James Bond* and *LOTR* were enjoyable games. But the reality is that sometimes revolutionary ideas don't sell, and game company X has to make *Crash Bandicoot Gets a New Hat 4* to pay the bills. It's also the truth that game companies have to appeal to more than hardcore gamers if they want to even consider staying afloat. //

XBN REGRETS:

Xbox Nation #14 contained the following errors:
1. In "The Fight is On," *XBN* mistakenly referred to *Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance* as *Dark Alliance*.
2. The Mad Catz's Blaster was listed as $99 in the Xtra section. The actual retail price is $29.99.
3. The *Splinter Cell* poster advertised on the magazine's cover shipped only with newsstand versions of *XBN*.

› Electronic Arts: Consistently delivering high-quality games, or mass-producing predictable clones? Ken Zotara argues the latter...



MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Strong Language
Violence

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

COMING SOON

XBOX

XBOX LIVE
ONLINE ENABLED

BEST OF E3 2003 WINNER

BEST SIMULATION
MOST ORIGINAL GAME

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- OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE

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- IGN.COM

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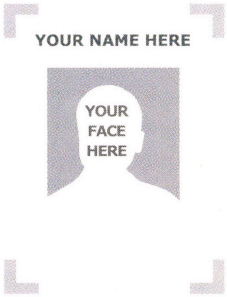


YOUR GAMEFACE

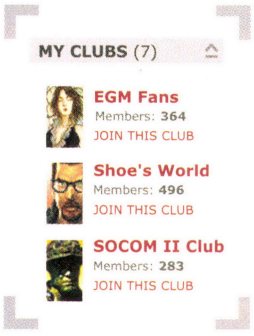
Show off your game collection and trade games with others!

YOUR GAMES

Get YOUR GameFace on.

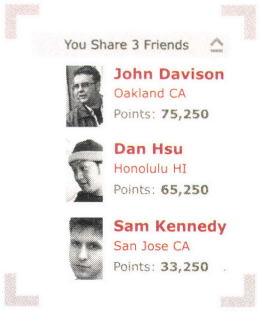
1UP.com™

Get clubbing! Join clubs or create your own and invite all of your friends.



YOUR CLUBS

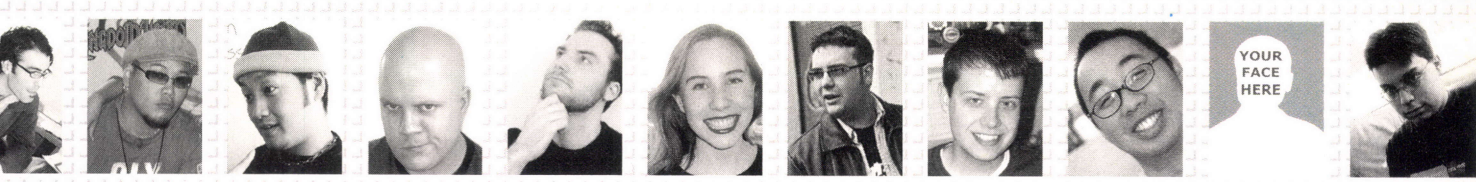
Make friends with other gamers - including us editors.



YOUR FRIENDS

You've got a voice, let it be heard! Tell everyone what you're playing or doing.

YOUR JOURNAL



We're all here. Join us at 1UP.com.

XPRESS

XBOX NEWS NETWORK JUNE 2004

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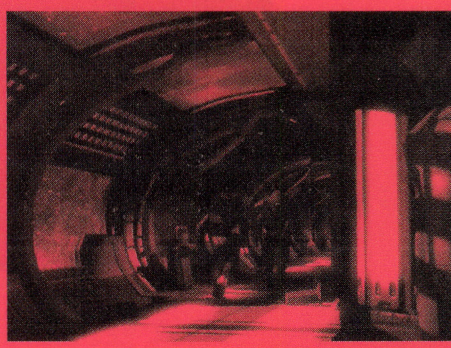
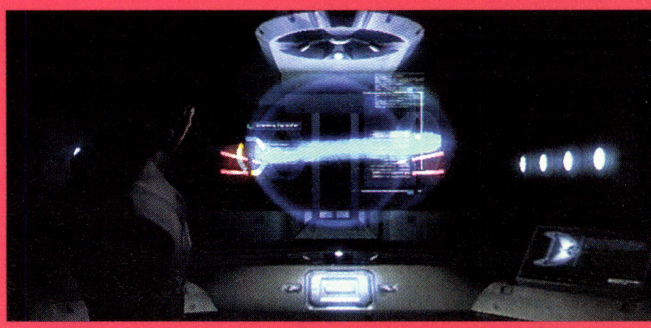
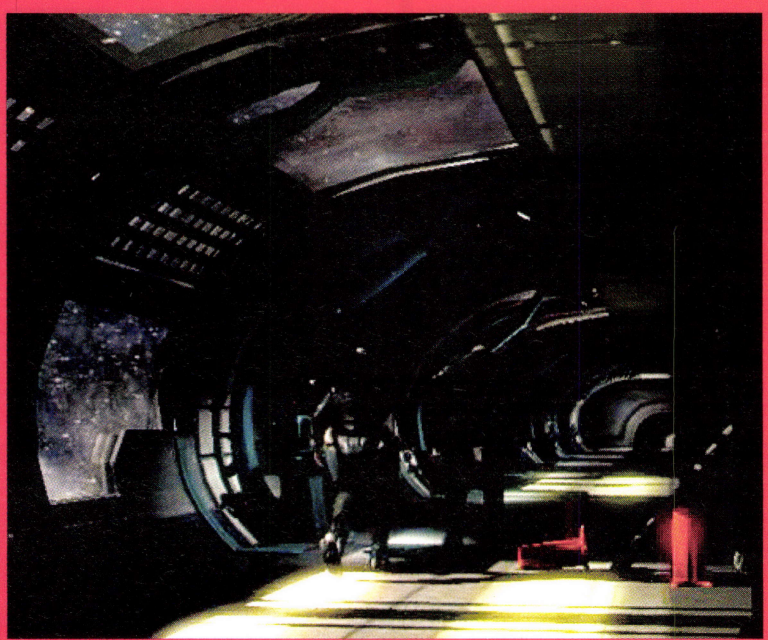






FIRST 4 NEXTBOX

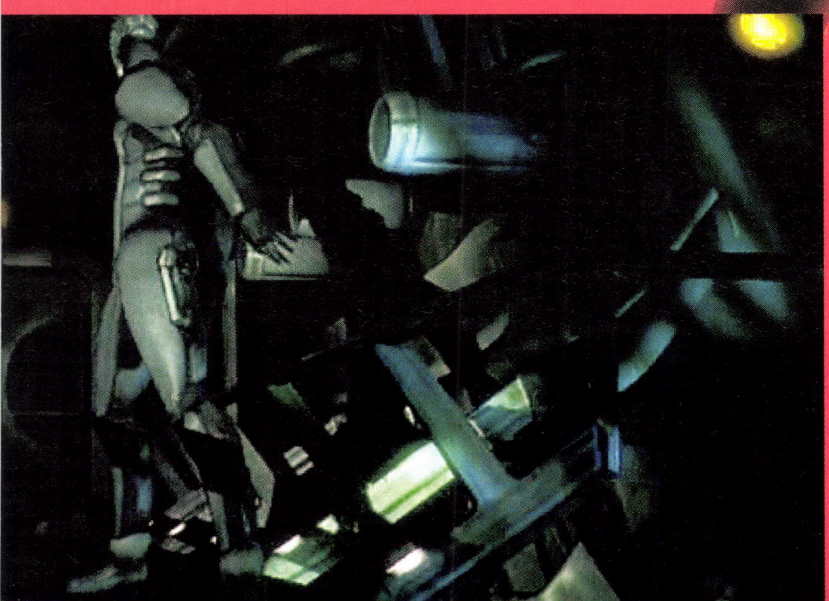
After years in the wilderness, Digital Extremes reannounces *Dark Sector*—this time for next-generation systems

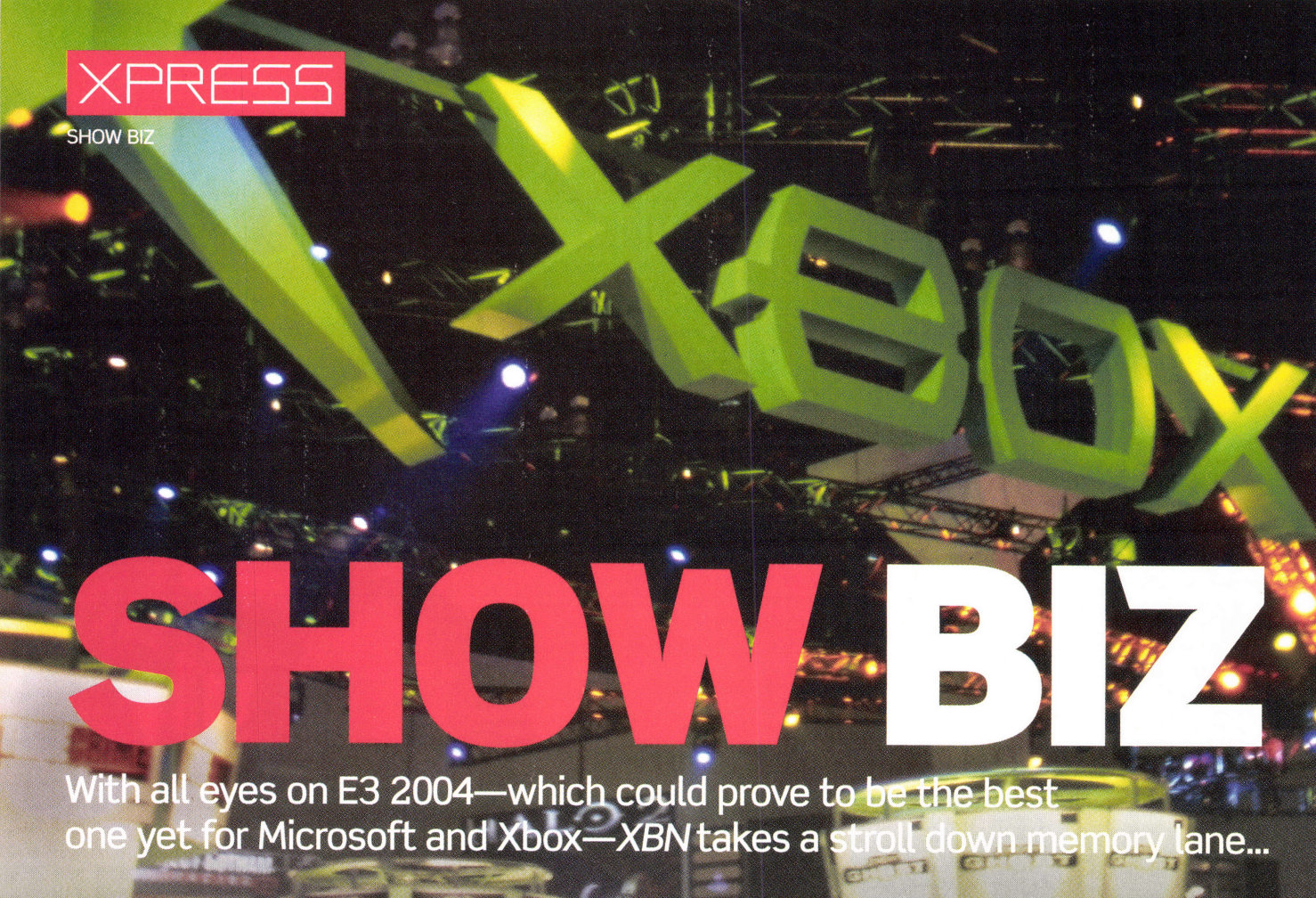
No one will be able to accuse Digital Extremes of rushing *Dark Sector*—its reannounced sci-fi first-person shooter—when the game makes its debut in 2006. The title was first revealed some five years ago, when it was pitched as "a futuristic massively multiplayer online RPG," and was supposed to be the next big thing from the world-class coders who had just put the finishing touches on *Unreal Tournament* for PC. But in 2001, things went a bit...well, dark. Now, with its unexpected April release of a video—one that shows a suitably futuristic setting, a mysterious hero, and some impressive graphical effects that are simply too much for the present-generation Xbox to cope with—Digital Extremes has reignited the world's interest in spectacular style. The code shop duly announced that *Dark Sector* was for next-generation systems, declining to specify further, no doubt in part because the game is more than two years away and *Pariah* (*XBN* #13) is due in the fall (and would no doubt like the limelight back, thank you very much).

Digital Extremes won't comment any further on this undeniably exciting prospect, but way back in 2000, Mac gaming website Inside Mac Games ran the following quote from then lead designer Juan Eeklels: "*Dark Sector* is the result of all people at Digital Extremes laying bare all their desires of what they wanted to see in a game. Now, all of this obviously stems from years and years of playing games across many platforms. And watching great movies on the big screen. Hopefully, this is what lots and lots of other gamers want to see as well." Indeed it is. Still, it's probably best to take heed of a note on the game's current website. It reads, "Everything you know about *Dark Sector* is probably wrong."

More info at: www.darksector.com

A VIDEO SHOWS GRAPHICAL EFFECTS THAT ARE SIMPLY TOO MUCH FOR THE PRESENT-GEN XBOX TO COPE WITH.





SHOW BIZ

With all eyes on E3 2004—which could prove to be the best one yet for Microsoft and Xbox—*XBN* takes a stroll down memory lane...

Trade shows can be exciting affairs. In the past, CES and E3 press conferences inevitably marked the announcements of major price cuts, impending holiday blockbusters, or the latest spate of ostensibly world-changing pieces of hardware. But despite its efforts, it seems as though Microsoft hasn't quite mastered the formula yet. After three E3s, the company has repeatedly overhyped games that underperformed or failed to show up on store shelves in time for the holidays, if ever. With Halo 2 surely set to break this pattern, XBN recaps some of the more interesting highlights and lowlights of E3s past...

// E3 2001: FIRST-TIME JITTERS

Having already unveiled the Xbox console and its controller at the January 2001 CES show, Microsoft delivered an E3 presentation that was as predictably reliable as *The Jerry Springer Show*—the biggest hardware news was Xbox's $299 retail price and its November 8, 2001, release date. Notably, the company differentiated Xbox from other consoles by touting its networking hardware, promising that consumers wouldn't have to buy anything extra to go online.

On the software front, Microsoft emphasized Sega's software—primarily the developer's sports franchises, but also its plans for *House of the Dead 3* and *Crazy Taxi 3*—and three titles from Capcom: *Genma Onimusha*, *Dino Crisis 3*, and *Steel Battalion* (then called *Brainbox*). It then announced plans to develop a game with Steven Spielberg (*AI*), and one featuring Bruce Lee's likeness, sandwiching footage of a little game called *Halo* in between presentations of *Munch's Oddysee* and *Mad Dash Racing*. The biggest wow of the event was Tecmo's *Dead or Alive 3*, which was the last game to be displayed and clearly outclassed almost everything else shown.

Microsoft's first holiday season went on to be by and large a success, marred only by delays and reports of faulty Xbox hardware. Microsoft missed its announced release date by a week, but still sold approximately 1.5 million machines. Similarly, although Capcom's and Sega's big games were nowhere to be found and no officially supported online games were ready for Xbox's first holiday season, Microsoft had two bona fide hits: *Halo* and the exquisite *DOA3*.

// E3 2002: THE SOFT SELL

Browbeaten by Sony into announcing an Xbox price cut the week before E3, Microsoft came to its pre-E3 press conference with only one major hardware announcement: the launch of the Xbox Live network, debuting 12 weeks before Christmas with one Live-enabled game release per week leading up to the holiday. But Microsoft also announced that current Xbox owners were in fact missing at least one thing they'd need to go online, namely a $50 per year Xbox Live service fee.

Microsoft's E3 focus remained on software: *Blinx*, *Brute Force*, *Kakuto Chojin*, *Kung Fu Chaos*, and *Quantum Redshift* were touted as likely 2002 hits. Updates to PC titles *Counter-Strike*, *Crimson Skies*, *MechAssault*, and *Midtown Madness 3* were also planned for 2002, and sequels to *Halo*, *Project Gotham Racing*, and *Amped* were announced as upcoming online titles. But hands-on time with many of the games revealed that few, if any, were better than B titles, and the first showing of a new RPG set in the *Star Wars* galaxy—*Knights of the Old Republic*—went by grossly underhyped.

By the 2002 holiday season, Microsoft was forced to make some tough choices. *Counter-Strike*, *Crimson Skies*, and *Midtown Madness 3* were all delayed for reworking, while *Blinx* and *Kakuto Chojin* were shipped half-finished in a desperate attempt to appear relevant. *Brute Force*, *Kung Fu Chaos*, and *Quantum Redshift* debuted to average reviews, none winning over the audiences Microsoft had originally expected.

MICROSOFT CLEARLY WANTED TO WIN CROWDS OVER ...AND ALMOST DID. THE WORLD'S FIRST LIVE DEMO OF HALO 2 CLOSED AND STOLE MICROSOFT'S PRE-E3 EVENT

Xbox Live shipped seven weeks late but sold quite well considering that only about 10 games supported online play. Online-enabled *Halo*, *Gotham*, and *Amped* were nowhere to be found. Ubisoft's new stealth-action title, *Splinter Cell* was roundly picked as Game of the Year.

// E3 2003: GETTING WARMER...

Although Microsoft's E3 2003 focus was again on software rather than hardware, it premiered a Music Mixer karaoke peripheral that failed to excite at its pre-E3 press conference. The company surprised the crowd by failing to announce a price cut to $179 for Xbox, instead waiting for Sony to drop PS2's price first. Sony delivered on the next day, leaving Microsoft to follow midshow.

Microsoft clearly wanted to win crowds over on software...and almost did. The world's first live demo of *Halo 2* closed and stole Microsoft's pre-E3 event, and videos of *Doom 3*, *True Fantasy Live Online*, and *Breakdown* also netted ample audience attention. Much of the show was devoted to the new Xbox Sports Network (XSN), supported by a host of hot-looking sports titles, most notably *Top Spin Tennis* and *Amped 2*. Impressive footage of an online-enabled *Project Gotham Racing 2* also drew applause, but many showgoers were left dumbfounded when Microsoft unveiled its first product from onetime Nintendo collaborator Rare, *Grabbed by the Ghoulies*.

Come the holidays, Microsoft's E3 announcements once again outstripped its delivery. Heavy hitters *Halo 2* and *Doom 3* slipped off of 2003 calendars, as did *True Fantasy Live Online* and *Breakdown*. Music Mixer was dramatically overshadowed by Sony's surprise hit EyeToy. And while *Gotham 2*, *Amped 2*, and *Top Spin* sold well and impressed gamers, the season's biggest Xbox hit was once again a game not touted by Microsoft—one not even slated for release until 2004. *Knights of the Old Republic* received as much E3 preview video time from Microsoft as *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* (7 seconds), and far less than *Republic Commando* (80 seconds), which is due for release later this year.

// E3 2004: ON FIRE?

Microsoft has an unusual track record, seemingly opting to overpromote products and features it's not yet ready to deliver on while failing to recognize many excellent first- and third-party games with huge potential. Any big debut at E3 2004 could be this year's *Blinx*, while any game hidden away on the show floor might be the next *KOTOR*.

With the show only weeks away as this issue goes to press, *XBN* remains confident that Microsoft will have more to show and deliver this year than ever before. There's thankfully little chance of another major *Halo 2* delay, and the company has a new game console to hint at—and most likely officially announce. Much of the software touted last year will have ripened into this year's stream of hits; hopefully Microsoft has gotten better at picking the likely winners and losers. Enough looking back, it's time to move forward... //

板垣 大解剖
ASK ITAGAKI!

Tecmo's head ninja answers your questions!

Q: In your opinion, which is cooler: ninjas or pirates?
A: [Smiling] I could not get myself to create a pirate game.

Q: Do you ever get a bit overwhelmed when you repeatedly postpone your projects over and over?
A: [Smiling] I increase my bet as much as I can when I gamble. If you are afraid of losing your stakes, you can't become a good gambler.

Q: What is your favorite American city and why?
A: Las Vegas.

Q: Do you like to watch anime? If so, what are some of your favorites?
A: *Arrivederci Space Cruiser Yamato* and *Galaxy Express 999*.

Q: What is the true purpose of the ninja?
A: There are multiple purposes. It would be like a secret force in today's military. Duties would include not only spying and invasion, but also the use of force.

Q: You're a pretty tough guy—do you sleep with weapons under your pillow?
A: I have a bunch of books.

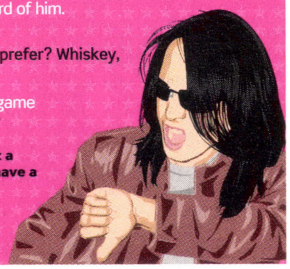
Q: True or False? The country of Brazil has the best and most beautiful women in the world.
A: Don't ask such questions before coming to Japan!

Q: If you *had* to work with another developer to co-develop a game, who would you work with and why?
A: I only like to work alone.

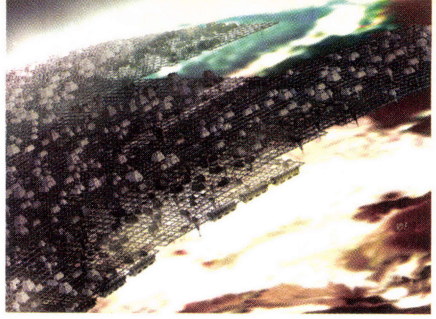
Q: How do you feel about the industry's current dependency on sequels?
A: The end result of a game reflects the intelligence level of the person(s) who created that game.

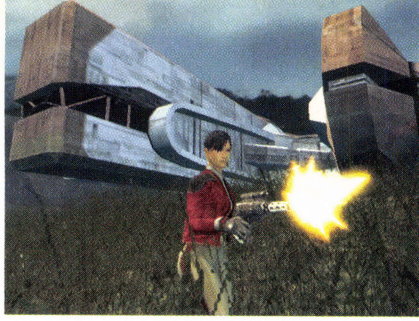
Q: Are you a friend of Konami's Akira Yamaoka (producer, *Silent Hill*)? You two look like rock stars!
A: I have never met him nor heard of him.

Q: What kind of alcohol do you prefer? Whiskey, wine, or beer?
A: Alcohol is very important to game development—I like them all. //



Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki is not a licensed therapist, nor does he have a degree in psychiatry. Have a question for Mr. Itagaki? Just e-mail us at at XBN@ziffdavis.com.





COMING SOON

KNIGHT LIFE

Preload us not into temptation...

Of all the things to be lord of—the dance, the rings—only one comes with your choice of really cool lightsabers and license to whack: the Sith. Hot on the success of the white-hot Xbox RPG *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, LucasArts and developer Obsidian Entertainment are planning to bring the Sith Lords to life.

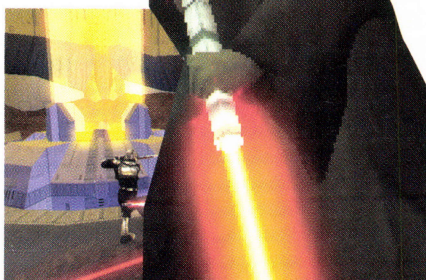
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic: The Sith Lords takes place five years after the original game, in a dramatically different galaxy. The Republic has crumbled, the Jedi council has been disbanded, and the vile Sith are in ascension. Players take the role of a Jedi in exile who's being hunted mercilessly by Sith assassins. Initially, players will have to reacquaint their hero with the Force and find or make a lightsaber to replace a lost one.

Developer Obsidian, taking over BioWare's role, promises not to tinker overmuch with the formula that made the original *Republic* so breathlessly wonderful. Players will again get to pilot the *Ebon Hawk*, choose between the dark and light side of the Force, and wield various ass-kicking Jedi powers. As in the first game, Jedi can specialize as either Sentinels, Guardians, or Consulars, but new to the mix are six prestige classes, three each for the light and dark side. Here, players with a light side inclination will be able to grow into, say, a Jedi Master or Jedi weapon master while evildoers can become Sith Lords or Sith assassins. Each of these prestige classes offers its own unique skill set and powers.

The rest, sadly, is a closely guarded secret, save for perhaps one interesting tidbit: Characters from the first game—think nonhuman ones—will make cameo appearances, and the game's nonplayer characters will be entirely new. Barring any unforeseen disturbances in the Force, *Lords* will see release in February 2005. //

Back in Black

Founded by team members from such PC hits as *Icewind Dale*, *Fallout*, *Planescape: Torment*, and *Baldur's Gate*, Obsidian Entertainment has been handed rights to development, with BioWare providing engine support.



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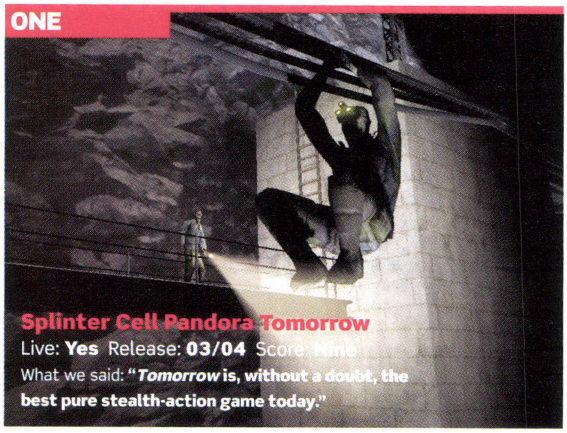
TRI STAR

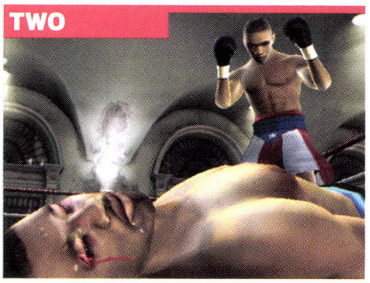
TOP 10: XBOX BEST-SELLERS (AS OF MAR. 2004)

ONE



Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow
Live: **Yes** Release: **03/04** Score: **Nine**
What we said: **"*Tomorrow* is, without a doubt, the best pure stealth-action game today."**

TWO



Fight Night 2004
Live: **No** Release: **04/04** Score: **Nine**
What we said: **"*Fight Night* represents a bold step forward for an all-but-stagnant genre."**

THREE

Ninja Gaiden
Live: **Yes** Release: **03/04** Score: **Nine**
What we said: **"If *Gaiden* isn't the 'perfect' action game, it's pretty damn close."**

FOUR

MVP Baseball 2004
Live: **No**
Release: **03/04**
Score: **Nine**
What we said: **"*MVP* offers fantastic action...and a baseball engine tuned to perfection."**

FIVE

NBA Ballers
Live: **No**
Release: **03/04**
Score: **Nine**
What we said: **"[It's] a star among basketball games and a must-have for any basketball fan on the planet."**

SIX

The Suffering
Live: **No**
Release: **03/04**
Score: **Seven**
What we said: **"*The Suffering* remains an enjoyable and surprisingly compelling blastathon."**

SEVEN

Yu-Gi-Oh! DOD
Live: **No**
Release: **04/04**
Score: **Four**
What we said: **"*Dawn of Destiny* is a poor use of money that could've gone toward more *Yu-Gi-Oh!* cards."**

EIGHT

ESPN MLB
Live: **Yes**
Release: **03/04**
Score: **Five**
What we said: **"This year's *MLB* seems less polished...and its graphics don't pack the punch they used to."**

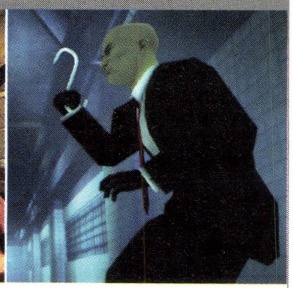
NINE

Halo
Live: **No**
Release: **11/01**
Score: **Ten**
What we said: **"*Halo* is, in a word, insanely great. Do it up."**

TEN

All-Star Baseball 2005
Live: **Yes**
Release: **03/04**
Score: **Three**
What we said: **"To the poor soul who considers plunking down $40 on this—save your dough."**

FAME...OR SHAME?



FAME!

The Chronicles of Riddick
Live: **No** Release: **06/04** Score: **Nine**
Escape from Butcher Bay is good, gritty, and gorgeous, so do some hard time as lovable, bald badass Riddick. It's better...

SHAME!

Hitman Contracts
Live: **No** Release: **05/04** Score: **Six**
...than putting Eidos' own clean-shaven killer through his paces. His noggin is finely polished; the game, lamentably, is not.

TOP 10 U.K.

Bravo, America's plucky, can-do pal across the pond!

1. **SC PANDORA TOMORROW** — Today your love, tomorrow, Guam!
2. **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY** — It's like bangers for mash.
3. **SONIC HEROES** — Even better than Sonic Burgers.
4. **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING** — Now with extra driving the wrong way.
5. **MAFIA** — It'll make a man out of you.
6. **GTA: DOUBLE PACK** — Just as good, twice as nice.
7. **JAMES BOND 007: EON** — Girls, guns, gadgets galore, glorious!
8. **DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR** — War—especially the invisible kind—is hell.
9. **LMA MANAGER 2004** — We don't know, either.
10. **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2** — Next up: *Keystone City Kart Racing.*

TOP 10 JAPAN

Those Japanese...they're crazy about ninjas!

1. **NINJA GAIDEN** — The beauty (and difficulty) makes us cry.
2. **TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: IT** — Thunder in paradise.
3. **COUNTER-STRIKE** — *Counter-strike*? So who'll take our order?
4. **AMPED 2** — Silly humans with your snowboarding.
5. **DEAD OR ALIVE 3** — Still alive—and kicking.
6. **STEEL BATTALION: LOC** — Logged off, chump.
7. **LINKS 2004** — Mmmm. Links and bacon.
8. **DOA: XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL** — Keeping abreast of the competition.
9. **PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2** — Use the acceleratrix!
10. **XBOX LIVE STARTER KIT** — Need a life? This'll get you started.

Numbers courtesy of Media Create [m-create.com]

Buckle up. Danger just called 'shotgun.'

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

DICE

Microsoft game studios

Take racing to the extreme as you spin out, fishtail, hydroplane, and skid your way through every environment you've always wanted to drive in. Choose from 91 tracks and over 40 powerful vehicles, including every famous rally car since 1979. Race in 5 different rally sports, like the Crossover Duel and Ice Racing. Take on the best in XSN Sports leagues and tournaments via Xbox Live. And anyone else who tries to steal your track space.

XBOX LIVE

RALLISPORT 2 CHALLENGE

XBOX

it's good to play together

xbox.com/rallisport2

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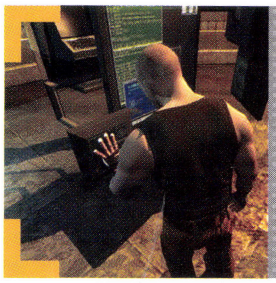
TRENDSPOTTING

Trends we like, and some we don't

Here's Trendspotting, your handy guide to what's hot—and what's not—in games today. From new ideas and technologies to misguided marketing and everything in between, *Xbox Nation* separates the cream from the crap.

Fresh Blood

They promised "no PC ports" and—for the most part—that's been the case. *Crimson Skies* flew onto Xbox in fine form, while *Rainbow Six 3* was redesigned from scratch. Next up? Ubisoft's *Far Cry*, a great PC FPS that's getting much more than just a new coat of paint...



The Whole 9 Yards

While we'll always have a soft spot for original IPs, we like tie-ins that serve as an integral part of a story—as opposed to simply retelling it. *Enter the Matrix* was a (small, very small) step in the right direction, but *Riddick* pretty much shivs...er, nails it.

One and the Same?

XNA—a shared software architecture for game development—left many developers impressed but cynics dubious: There must be more to the future than shiny cars, sultry girls, and aliens. Does the future hold homogeny or hegemony?

Wash That Mouth!

The excessive foul language that's all the rage in games is like having the *XBN* staff in your TV—and that's not a good thing. "Gritty" games like *The Suffering* sport the sort of swearing that would make a B movie blush. Gaming grows up? Hardly.

The Good Die Old

Sure, they were already a little long in the tooth (not to mention facing mediocre sales, at best), but we were really hoping to someday see the long arm of Microsoft pushing *Psychonauts* and the next edition of *Oddworld* to the masses. Sigh.

XPANSION:
GET MORE FROM YOUR XBOX

So you think you've already heard it all? Then listen carefully, Xbox fans—you ain't heard nothing yet.

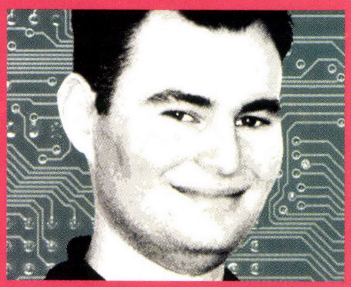
The audio power of your Xbox is more impressive than you realize. If you've been using cheap speakers or the ones inside your television, now (read: before *Halo 2*) is the time to trade up to something better.

Why bother, you ask? Three words: "surround sound" and "quality." If you keep getting sacked, outraced, or killed by people approaching from the rear, there's a good chance you would have heard it coming if you had had surround-sound speakers.

Then there's quality. Until you've used really good speakers or headphones, you won't realize how many instruments and sounds you've been missing in your audio. After trying the right gear, you'll want to go back and listen to all your music and games again. Seriously.

Good-sounding surround speakers usually cost at least $200. Got a tighter budget? Skip Intec's and Monster's 5.1 sets for Xbox and consider Creative's Inspire GD580s, which you can get for $170, including a wireless remote and two headphone jacks. Conversely, Microsoft's official all-digital Xbox speaker set will retail for $500 when it's released.

If you'd rather take the headphone route, here are some tasty options that do for music what VGA monitors and HDTVs do for pixels: Etymotic's ER-4Ps ($330) render amazingly clear audio, separating out voices and instruments in ways previously unimaginable. The price may be high, but they sound so good that you'll never wear those cheap Sonys again. Shure's E2 headphones ($80) are a better option for those with slightly smaller wallets. // **Jeremy Horwitz**



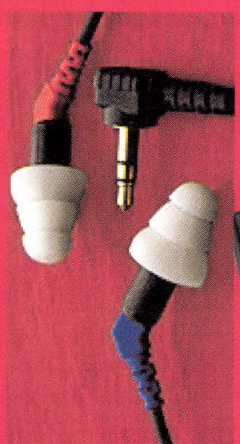
SOUND ADVICE:

Your games should sound as good as they look. Here's what you'll need to make it happen:

5.1 channel surround-sound speaker set. One box contains five small satellites and an integrated amplifier with a subwoofer (for bass). Avoid products that support only Dolby's Pro Logic—90 percent of Xbox games support the superior Dolby Digital standard.

Microsoft's Xbox AV Pack ($20). It contains an optical audio port for crystalline output.

Fiber-optic audio cable ($5 to $10). To run from the AV Pack to your amplifier.



Hear your games like never before: Etymotic's ER-4Ps teach your ears to truly listen for details, while Creative's GD580s fully surround you. Top right: Canada-based SphereX created Microsoft's "Official" Xbox Surround speakers.

TOURNAMENTS 24/7
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FINAL FIGHT! // MIDWAY

FINAL FIGHT!

Apparently, fighting fair is for losers

In early March, Microsoft hosted the final (and most bizarre) round of the Xbox Championship Vol. 4: *Dead or Alive 3* in Japan. Thirty-two qualifying participants and a handful of onlookers gathered for the event at Shinjuku's famous Studio Alta, a hotspot for TV actors and loitering teenagers.

With *Dead or Alive 3* as the most popular and best-selling Xbox title, Microsoft obviously had high hopes for the event. Unfortunately for its already troubled Xbox division, the event was all but hijacked by oddball Osaka resident Kazuya Okubo.

Using *DOA3* combatant Hayate, Okubo rolled his way to first place, 650,000 yen ($6,000), and a Hawaiian vacation. Although it's technically legal in terms of tournament rules, Okubo employed Hayate's snipping dodge move, *shippu-ten*, to spin around his opponents repeatedly until they attacked, subsequently missing in frustration.

Other participants, play-by-play announcers, and audience members all demonstrated their disgust as Okubo defeated some of Japan's top *Dead or Alive 3* players. Adding insult to injury, Okubo admitted at a preliminary round in Osaka two weeks earlier that he had just started playing the game.

Among the people angered by Okubo's fighting style was Chihaya Hamada from Chiba prefecture—the tournament's only female contestant—who lost to Okubo in the first round. "It was embarrassing to lose to him," she says. "I'm waiting for revenge."

Any resentment for Okubo was only compounded as he broke away between matches to weep in nearby bathroom stalls. (Whether he was crying out of nervousness or stress is unclear.) With red eyes and a flushed face, Okubo was handed his winnings by model Mari Shimomura, who wore a pink *Dead or Alive* bikini. Okubo—presumably dry eyed—traveled with Shimomura to Hawaii on March 25. //

More info at: **xbox.com/ja-JP/news/news/20040309.htm**

RETURN TO MIDWAY

Epic online action in the Pacific

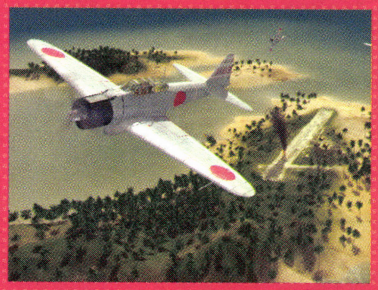
Even with all the rumblings of a possible truce between Electronic Arts and Microsoft over the sticky issue of Xbox Live support, there hasn't been a peep about a console version of EA's überpopular *Battlefield* series. Well, good news for online war junkies: European developer SCi recently unveiled *Return to Midway*, a large-scale WWII action-strategy hybrid with striking good looks, set in the Asia-Pacific theater for PC and Xbox. For both platforms, *Midway* will undoubtedly emphasize online play.

But rather than controlling individual soldiers from a first-person view à la the *Battlefield* series, players take on a higher-level command perspective that allows them to strategize fleets and fighter wings. At standby is the combined might of powerful nations. Vehicles such as attack boats, destroyers, battleships, aircraft carriers, fighter planes (launched from your carrier or from islands), bombers, seaplanes, and submarines are just a small sampling of the total units available.

During the game, players may commandeer any unit at any time, giving *Midway* an interesting action-shooter twist.

Developer SCi is currently knee-deep in a painstaking game of *Publisher Quest* here in the U.S. Expect an announcement in 2004. //

More info at: **www.sci.co.uk**



DETAILS, DETAILS

Midway has a number of visual touches that give the game its authenticity. Naval battles are affected by random weather (imagine cannon battles on the high seas with huge rolling waves, thick fog, and rain), while planes launching from carriers are actually elevated up to the runway from storage below. Look closely on the decks of ships, and you'll spot sailors and vessel crew. Run the risk of having the periscope of your submarine spotted, and you'll find yourself locked in a tense game of cat-and-mouse with enemy destroyers and depth charges. *Das boot! Das boot!*

News Bits

Tidbits of news for you and me

PRICE X-CISION

Legal fun to be had on the cheap

Microsoft recently announced further price cuts on Xbox. The standard hardware—which includes one Controller S—is now available nationwide for a mere $149.99. Sweetening the deal further, the Redmond, WA, company slashed the price of its *Xbox Music Maker* to $19.99, while recent releases including *Counter-Strike*, *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge*, and *Project Gotham Racing 2* can be had for just $29.99.

GREEN IS GOOD

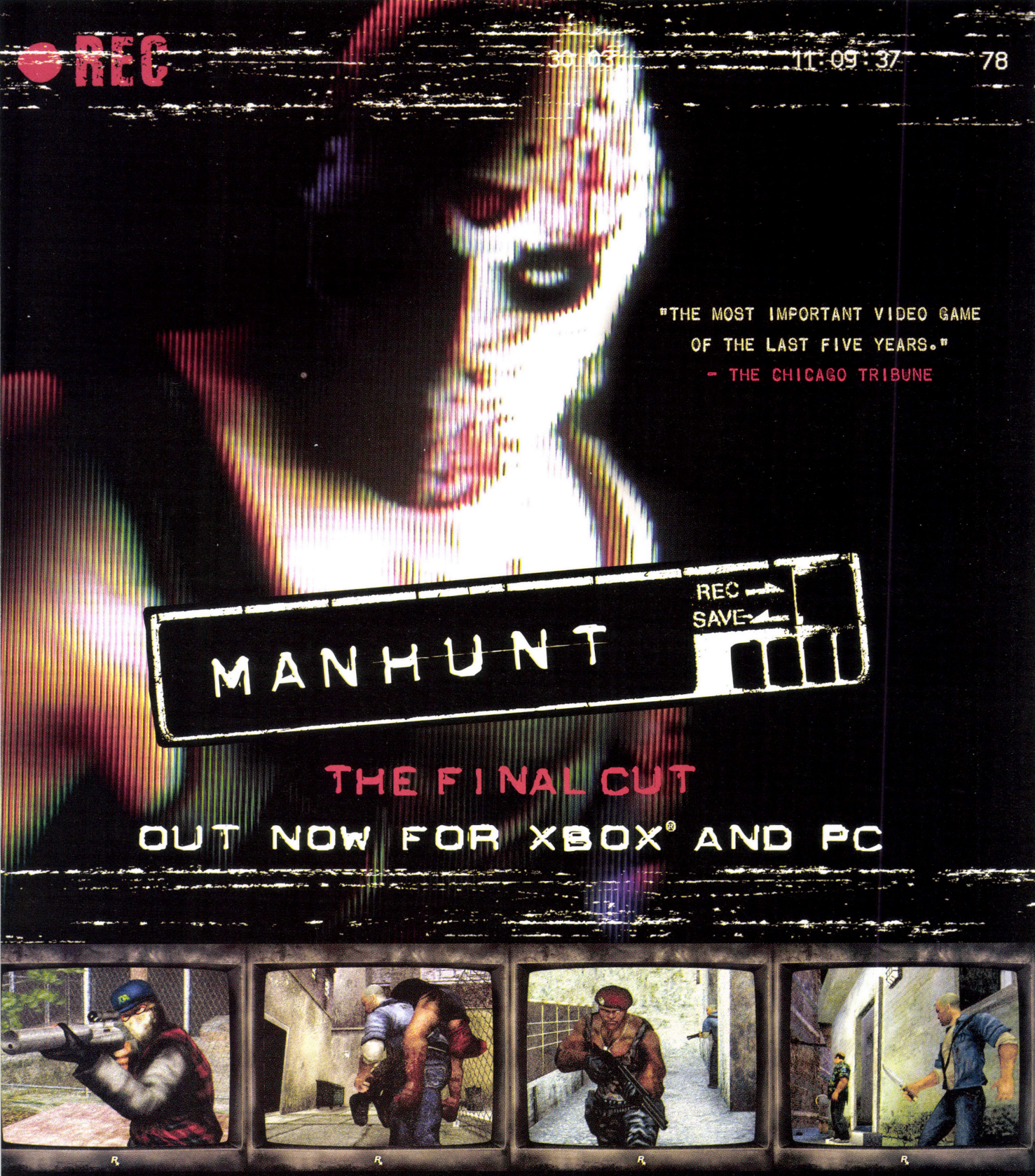
U.S. Xboxers envious no more

Of course, if you're reading this magazine just because you have Xbox envy, we suggest scrounging up the extra $20 for this limited-edition *Halo*-branded Xbox console, limited to a production run of 200,000 units. $169.99 gets gamers an Xbox in a translucent green casing, a *Halo*-branded controller, and bragging rights.

E3 FOR MORTALS

New game expo open to public

Expo International announced the first-ever videogame show targeted at gamers and consumers. GameOn NY has been scheduled for November 12-14 at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Although exhibitor details have yet to be announced, attendees can look forward to hands-on time with recent and unreleased games, cash- and prize-based tournaments, and the now obligatory B-grade celebrities and musical acts.



WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/MANHUNT

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Strong Language
Blood and Gore
Intense Violence

PlayStation.2 XBOX PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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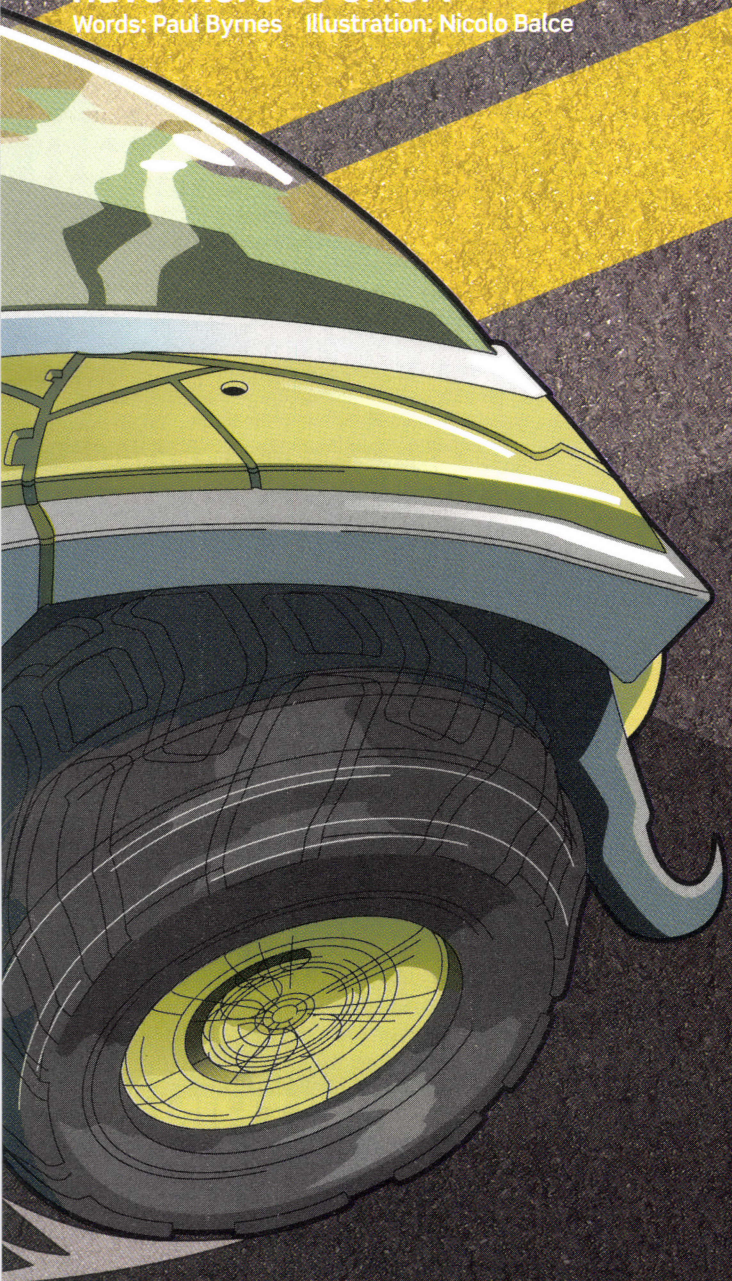
ARE WE THERE YET?

ARE WE THERE YET?

Will *Halo 2* prove to be the end of the graphical road? Or does Xbox have more to offer?

Words: Paul Byrnes Illustration: Nicolo Balce



For a long time, *Halo*, *DOA3*, *Splinter Cell*, and a meager handful of others have been the only games to make the most of Xbox's technical abilities. Now *Ninja Gaiden* has arrived, stunning even nonbelievers. *Doom 3* has been pushed back, but we have *The Chronicles of Riddick*. *Half-Life 2* seems to be forever on the horizon, but *Far Cry* suddenly seems tangible. *Jade Empire* will be here this winter. And then, of course, *Halo 2* lingers. XBN takes a whirlwind Warthog tour to ask the best in the biz what they're doing to make their games the very best...

We had an inkling it'd be an interesting trip when we first hit the road with Xbox. Our expectations were raised at the very first stop—*Halo*—and that was only the beginning. Any console's life cycle is a journey: As developers become more familiar with the hardware, they can build more graphically impressive game engines. With Xbox clearly into its middle years, now's as good a time as any to stop for gas, grab some burgers, and look at the map. How much more can Xbox give? How long is the road ahead? What wonders might we see along the way?

"THE NEXT WAVE OF XBOX GAMES WILL NOT ONLY LOOK BETTER THAN WHAT HAS COME BEFORE, THEY'LL ALSO BE MORE DISTINCTIVE."
—DANNY OROS, UBISOFT

A different way to navigate

In the past, whenever a new game console was released, developers would use the increased power to handle more geometric detail and sharper textures, raising the bar for graphical quality. But in the current console generation, we've seen much more than another step toward photo-realism. These days, it's the games that emphasize a few tailor-made *effects*—*Knights of the Old Republic*'s lightsabers, *Splinter Cell*'s night vision, *Prince of Persia*'s streaming sunlight—that really stand out from the crowd.

"As developers become more familiar with the hardware, they tend to refocus on clarity of design and very specific special effects," Dene Carter, codirector of Big Blue Box, says. "By optimizing our engine specifically for Xbox, we've actually been able to do some things we'd never considered when we began [*Fable*], like dynamic shadowing that changes with the time of day."

"Developers' experience with the console will help them make better design decisions," Danny Oros, technical director at Ubisoft Montreal (developer of *Prince of Persia* and the upcoming *Far Cry*), agrees.

"We're very careful to make sure that we choose our 'money' features and then build an engine that can support them," BioWare's joint CEO Greg Zeschuk concurs. Developers are no longer asking themselves, "How much performance can we squeeze out of the hardware?" but rather, "What's the best way to use that performance in our game?" In other words, they've realized that a faster car doesn't just get you there sooner; it can reach a wider array of destinations in the same driving time.

Looking down the road

Technically speaking, game developers are pushing Xbox about as far as it can go. "The *B.C.* graphics engine's performance is now within a few percent of the theoretical maximum specs for the Xbox," Des Owens, lead graphics programmer at Intrepid, says.

"[In terms of raw performance], there is not much more that can be done using the current hardware with what we currently know," Ubisoft's Oros agrees, "but there is yet much to do by putting proper resources and efforts toward design." Thankfully, that's exactly what's happening. As a result, the next wave of Xbox games will not only look better than what has come before, they'll also be more distinctive.

"Our focus has always been on making *Fable* look unique so that even if you saw a tiny part of a screenshot, it would be instantly recognizable," Carter says. Because *Fable* is an RPG, the team has opted to concentrate on a very detailed and customizable player character whose appearance varies with age, abilities, and whether you play as a good guy or a heartless villain.

Meanwhile, *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* emphasizes lighting and shadows, both of which are certainly important in a stealth-action game in which the main character sneaks around and shivs prison guards. "We are now using per-pixel lighting with normal mapping on all surfaces in the game," Magnus Högdahl, technical director at Sweden-based developer Starbreeze, says, having just finished up work on *Riddick*. That means, for example, if Riddick fires up a flamethrower, his enemies will reflect the appropriate ruddy glow.

BioWare's RPG *Jade Empire* features a special animation system to proudly show off its entirely motion-captured chop-socky, a first for the developer. "We also have a physics-based cloth system," Zeschuk says. "Each player character in the game is wearing some flowing cloth that moves naturally with character movement—ideal for a martial arts role-playing game."

Since the island setting is so important to *Far Cry*'s gameplay, the developers at Ubisoft Montreal have opted for "a good base lighting and shadowing system to push the scenes a little further in depth relativity," Oros says. "We're trying to achieve something more immersive for the player, including moving tree leaves and self-shadowing objects and characters." Joe Graf at Epic Games says, "For *Unreal Championship 2*, we use a number of advanced features that give our game a very distinctive look. Our light bloom and depth of field effects make each scene feel more real and at the same time, more unreal." Since the game is a first-person shooter, effects like light bloom—which simulates how human eyes take a moment to adjust when moving from darkness to light—help to create a more convincing, visceral experience.

These are just a few examples of how some developers have changed their approach to graphical quality in the last few years. Before the introduction of current consoles, about all gamemakers could do was optimize their engines to display as much detail as possible. Today, more powerful hardware (such as Xbox) gives them the ability not only to make their games look better, but also to concentrate on the visual effects that complement a title's gameplay. Beauty, apparently, is no longer skin deep.

So...are we there yet?

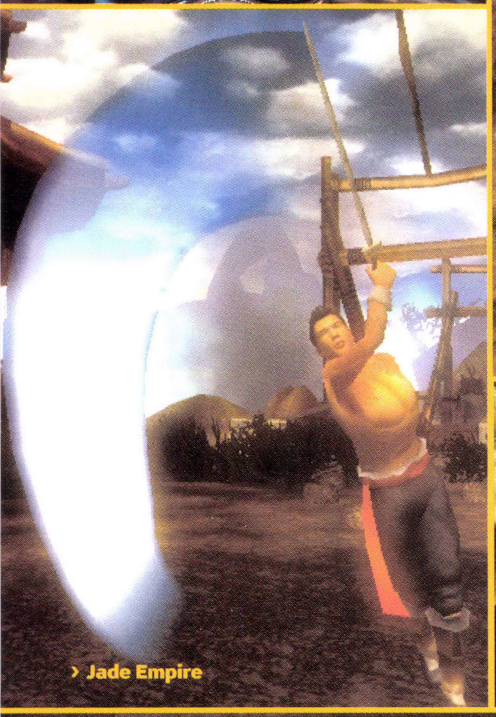
In terms of raw power, developers have Xbox crunching as many numbers as it can crunch. We're here. But don't pack up and head home yet. Because of their experience with the console and the time they've spent discovering (or inventing) new ways to use its capabilities, developers now have a truly unprecedented repertoire of graphical techniques at their disposal.

So hold on to your hats. We've seen some great looking games on this road trip—*Halo*, *DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, *Splinter Cell*, and the like—but even those games pale in comparison to what we'll be seeing in the coming months. Because developers are applying Xbox's tremendous power to meet their own project's particular challenges, our destination is far more varied and interesting than we ever could have guessed when we hit the road. And the view just keeps getting better. //

"THE *B.C.* GRAPHICS ENGINE IS NOW WITHIN A FEW PERCENT OF THE THEORETICAL MAXIMUM SPECS FOR THE XBOX."
—DES OWENS, INTREPID

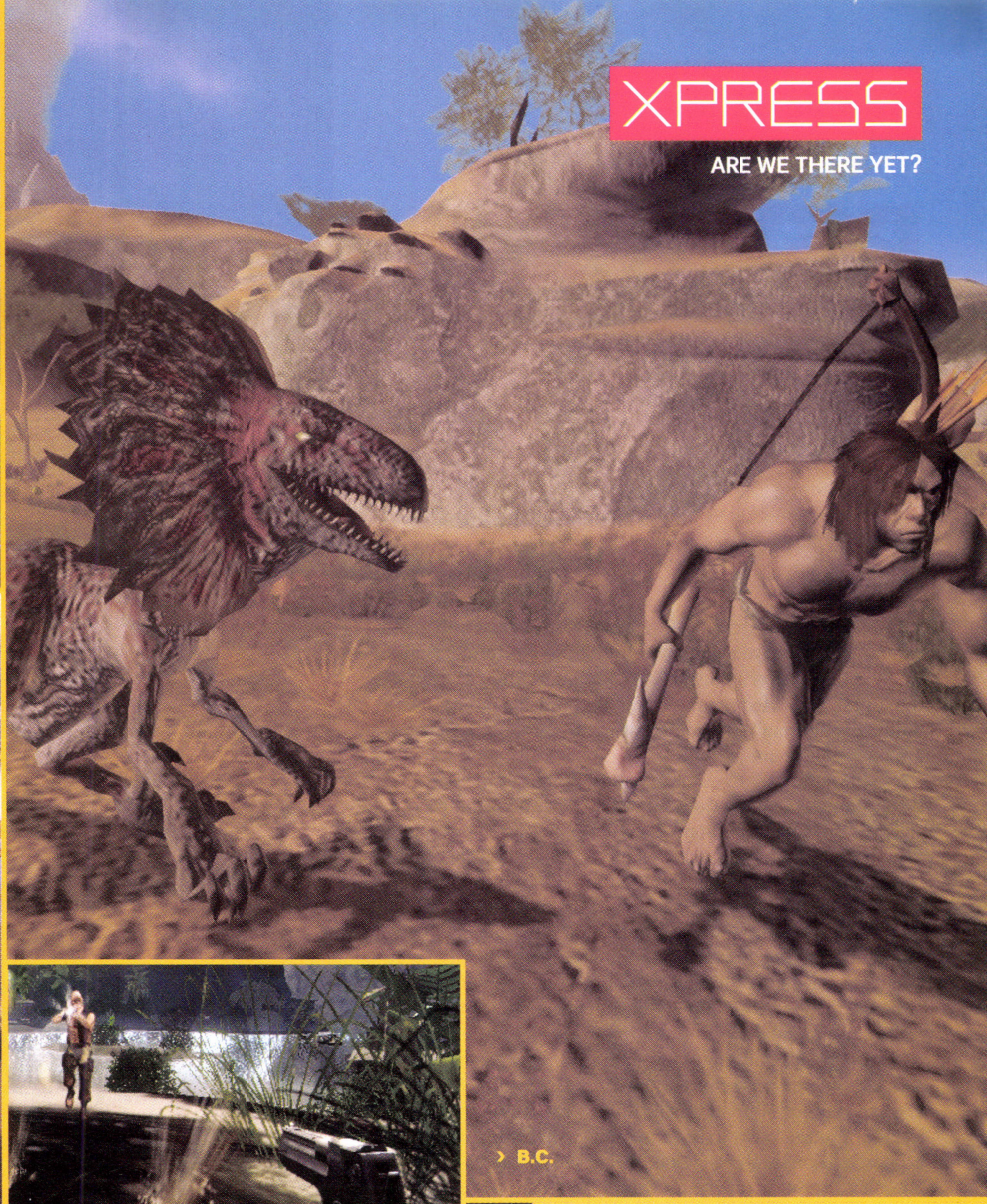
› DOA: Ultimate

› Unreal Championship 2


› Jade Empire

› Far Cry: Instincts

› The Chronicles of Riddick


› B.C.

Where's Middleware?

Between hardware and software is middleware, versatile computer code that can be incorporated into any type of game engine. As a kind of interpreter between the game and the console, it greatly simplifies common programming tasks. Each console has its own middleware, while some third-party companies offer multiplatform packages that make it much easier to develop a game simultaneously for Xbox, PlayStation 2, and GameCube. Is middleware helping developers get the most out of Xbox?

"Middleware and sample code provided by Microsoft are very useful. If you write all the code from scratch, it would take years to complete a game," Tomonobu Itagaki of Tecmo's Team Ninja (*Ninja Gaiden*) says.

"All of our graphics tools were developed in-house. However, profiling and debugging tools from Microsoft have been invaluable for quickly spotting performance hot spots," Des Owens of Intrepid says.

Some enthusiasts claim middleware will halve the time and money required to develop a videogame, but apparently, that golden age hasn't arrived yet. Starbreeze's Magnus Högdahl explains, "The tools have certainly gotten better over time, but they don't write an engine for you."

PSYCHO-NOT

MICROSOFT BIDS TWO DEVELOPERS GOOD-BYE

The Microsoft Game Studios release list lost two games in April. *Psychonauts*, the surreal 3D platformer from Tim Schafer's Double Fine studio, and *Steef's Oddysee*, the tentatively titled shooter from Oddworld Inhabitants, were both dropped from Microsoft's first-party slate. Both developers are seeking new publishers.

In Oddworld's case, the news became official at the Game Developers Conference. Oddworld Inhabitants hung out its shingle at the show and announced it was talking to multiple publishers. It's hard to pinpoint when the break actually happened, though. Rumors that *Steef* had left the Microsoft fold began circulating in the summer of 2003, but neither Oddworld nor Microsoft went public until March. GDC also brought vague inklings of changes to the game that debuted on the Discovery Channel last year. Now, Oddworld refers to it as *The Stranger*, although the lead character in the prerendered GDC trailer is the same one shown before.

The Double Fine breakup came in the form of a brief public announcement from Microsoft. The official word was positive, if impersonally so: "Microsoft Game Studios believes in the vision of the title and would like to see the game on Xbox. Microsoft is supporting Tim Schafer and Double Fine in their search for a new publisher." However, off-the-record comments from insiders painted a different picture. After four years in development and commensurate funding from Microsoft, getting the game in shape for release is still said to be an uphill battle.

Why Microsoft let either game go is one question nobody is willing to openly answer. Some observers have pointed to Ed Fries' departure from Microsoft Game Studios as a sign of a coming shake-up, but both games were reportedly on the rocks when Fries was still in charge. With nearly seven years of development between them, it will be interesting to see if either title can find new life elsewhere. //

More info at: **www.doublefine.com**
and: **www.oddworld.com**

Def Jam Vendetta II

Time to get your grill adjusted

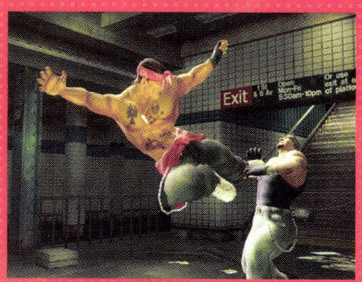
***Def Jam Vendetta* was a surprise hit when it came out last year, boasting a deep wrestling engine (courtesy of beat-down scientists Aki) and a roster packed with some of hip-hop's most flamboyant personalities. The sequel currently in development ups the ante in almost every conceivable way—more fighters, more meaningfully interactive arenas, and the enticing possibility of Xbox Live support.**

EA apparently listened to all the gripes regarding the first *Vendetta*, and it has implemented a robust create-a-wrestler mode into the sequel as a result. Players can customize every aspect of their fighters' looks, buy licensed clothing with money earned from fights, and even customize their fighting styles. Five types of fighting are available in all—street fighting, kickboxing, martial arts, wrestling, and submission—and players will be able to draw moves from up to three in order to craft their repertoires.

Over 35 rappers will make up the game's cast, including Busta Rhymes, Public Enemy's Flava Flav, Ghostface, Ice-T, Joe Budden, Lil' Kim, Ludacris, Method Man, Redman, Slick Rick, and Snoop Dogg, among others. EA is apparently drawing from the golden age of rap in order to round out the mostly new-school roster, and the result should be pretty exciting for hip-hop-heads.

While Xbox Live support hasn't yet been formally announced, the PS2 version of the game will support online play. And with the mutterings of EA's embrace of Xbox Live, it's not too far-fetched to assume that *DJVII* (a working title) will benefit from this. In any event, the honeymoon to the bulletproof marriage of hip-hop and fisticuffs is set to arrive this fall, so keep your teeth clean for the coming curb stomp. //

More info at: **www.eagames.com**



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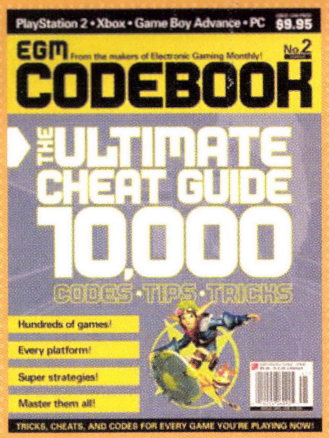

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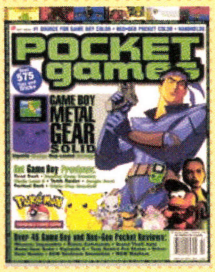

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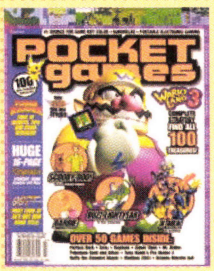

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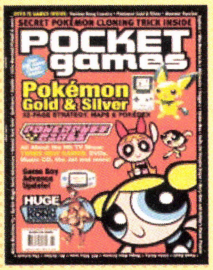

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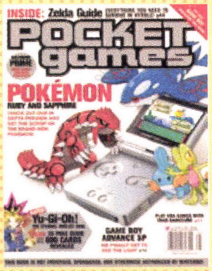

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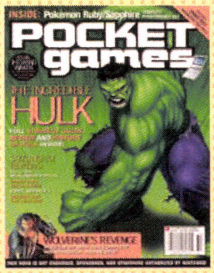

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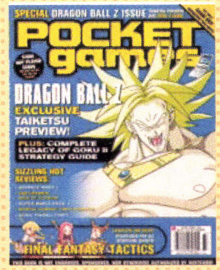

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XPRESS INTERNATIONAL

XBN GLOBAL NEWS NETWORK

U.K.

ARCADE U.K. A-OK!

Sega's headquarters in Japan is making a connection in London to create the next generation of hardware for its arcade games. Imagination Technologies, the U.K. company responsible for the PowerVR 3D graphics technology, will partner with Sega to develop PowerVR hardware that will form the heart of a new arcade board. Sega previously used off-the-shelf PowerVR-based hardware to drive the graphics of the Dreamcast—and the Naomi arcade board based on it—but this board will apparently be something entirely new.

GERMANY

X-RATED NOT OK

Far Cry was created in Germany, but it can't be sold there, at least not in the form developer Crytek intended gamers to see. The Xbox-bound shooter was temporarily banned in its home country to make way for a safely sanitized version—Germans can apparently watch creepy serial-killer movies like *Tattoo* without hindrance, but violent videogames are out of the question.

NIGERIA

XBOX FAR FROM HOME

Nigerian university student Titilope Sanni won an Xbox as the first prize in a Nigerian milk company's Peak Mom of the Year contest in March, snagging the console for writing the best essay about his mother. Somebody at the West African Milk Company must be an Xbox fan because a PlayStation 2 was relegated to the role of second prize. The big question, though, is where the console came from and what the lucky winner is going to do for software—Microsoft doesn't legitimately market the Xbox anywhere in Africa.

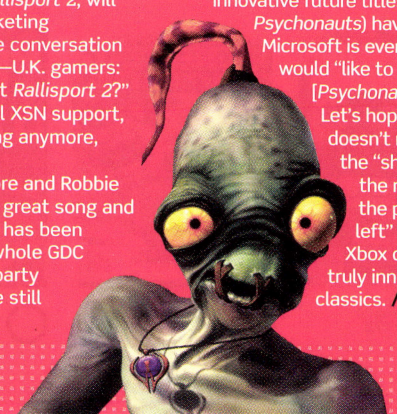
LONDON CALLING: XBOX IN THE U.K.

Andy Hartup
News Editor
XBM

What with all the excitement around Microsoft's in-house clear out, the games seem to have taken a backseat this month as we hurtle headlong toward the E3 game show. As Xbox loses its own American sports titles (news that is lost on the people over here who are wrapped up in the fact that *Pro Evolution Soccer* is finally coming to Xbox), it seems that the best XSN title yet, *Rallisport 2*, will be receiving a mixed marketing campaign. We imagine the conversation will run along these lines—U.K. gamers: "So, what's so great about *Rallisport 2*?" Microsoft: "Well, it has full XSN support, which we aren't supporting anymore, but it's great anyway!"

In fact, while Peter Moore and Robbie Bach have been making a great song and dance concerning XNA, the company as a whole has been carefully ditching the undesirables, hoping the whole GDC furor might hide the announcements. Five first-party games were ditched in one week, and people are still trying to look up the skirt of that femme fatale in the film noir XNA demo. Had Microsoft shown a Ferrari on the crash demo, it might have been able to safely ditch Rare for lack of return.

OK, in all seriousness, it all boils down to the fact that here in the United Kingdom, we've been very guilty of looking into the future this month and ignoring some real gems that you've had the pleasure to play for a while now. *Deus Ex: Invisible War* is awesome, *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* is one of the biggest games to ever hit Live, *Ninja Gaiden* is on its way, and *Fable* is looking all but finished. More disturbingly, two of Xbox's most innovative future titles (*Oddworld: Stranger* and *Psychonauts*) have been dumped with minimum fuss. Microsoft is even saying that it would "like to see [*Psychonauts*] on Xbox." Let's hope the company doesn't make a habit of the "shake hands with the right and pick the pocket with the left" strategy, or Xbox could lose some truly innovative future classics. //



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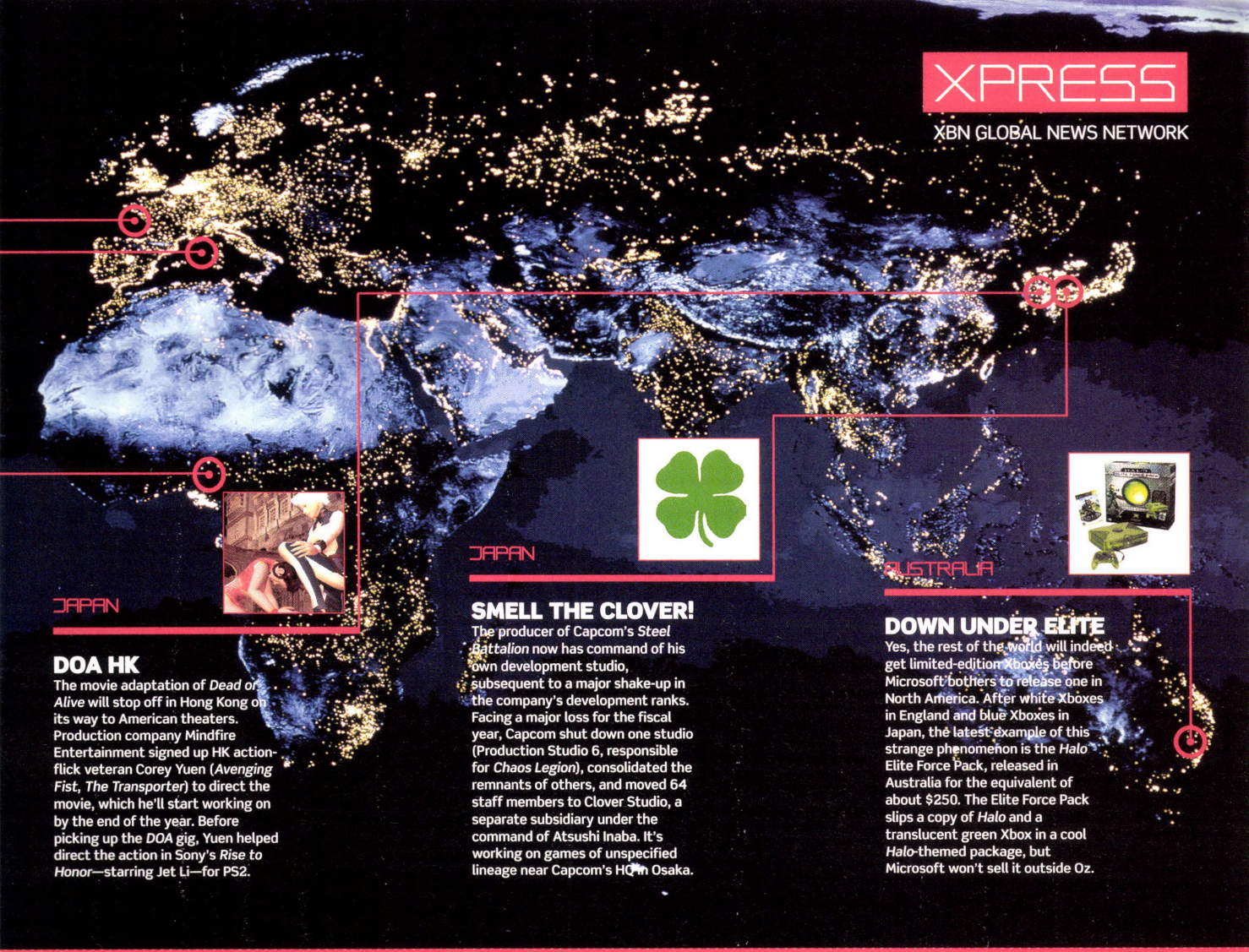
GAMES

Number of games developed in Japan on the U.K. top 10 Xbox charts.



JAPAN

DOA HK

The movie adaptation of *Dead or Alive* will stop off in Hong Kong on its way to American theaters. Production company Mindfire Entertainment signed up HK action-flick veteran Corey Yuen (*Avenging Fist*, *The Transporter*) to direct the movie, which he'll start working on by the end of the year. Before picking up the *DOA* gig, Yuen helped direct the action in Sony's *Rise to Honor*—starring Jet Li—for PS2.

JAPAN

SMELL THE CLOVER!

The producer of Capcom's *Steel Battalion* now has command of his own development studio, subsequent to a major shake-up in the company's development ranks. Facing a major loss for the fiscal year, Capcom shut down one studio (Production Studio 6, responsible for *Chaos Legion*), consolidated the remnants of others, and moved 64 staff members to Clover Studio, a separate subsidiary under the command of Atsushi Inaba. It's working on games of unspecified lineage near Capcom's HQ in Osaka.

AUSTRALIA

DOWN UNDER ELITE

Yes, the rest of the world will indeed get limited-edition Xboxes before Microsoft bothers to release one in North America. After white Xboxes in England and blue Xboxes in Japan, the latest example of this strange phenomenon is the *Halo* Elite Force Pack, released in Australia for the equivalent of about $250. The Elite Force Pack slips a copy of *Halo* and a translucent green Xbox in a cool *Halo*-themed package, but Microsoft won't sell it outside Oz.

TOKYO TRIBE: XBOX IN JAPAN

Everybody has a theory as to why Xbox has failed thus far in Japan: The console is too big, and its software library is too small. Its games are too American—not Japanese enough. All of these criticisms are valid, but a few people have made the case that Microsoft of Japan imports too many first-person shooters, a genre that has yet to take off in Japan.

Some argue that because guns are largely illegal in Japan, they can never be a part of Japanese culture like they are in America. But not so quick: Some of Japan's biggest game exports, such as *Resident Evil* and *Metal Gear Solid*, involve intense gun-based action. And to compound the problem, the feverish popularity of *Counter-Strike* in surrounding Southeast Asian countries proves that first-person shooters are not just for Western markets. So what's up with Japan?

FAST FACT

6.00

GAMES

Number of games developed in the West on the Japan top 10 charts.

Over a bowl of curry in Kyoto, I posed the question to Steven L. Kent, author of *The Ultimate History of Video Games*. He made the point that the Japanese enjoy shooters of a different breed. Games such as *Time Crisis* and *House of the Dead* offer gun action through the eyes of the character, but the action runs on "rails," like an amusement park ride. Will Master Chief have to be tied to rails for *Halo* to be a success in Japan?

The answer may lie not with American developers, but with Japanese developers. While it isn't for everybody, Namco's *Breakdown* is a telling example of what Japan can do with the genre. *Breakdown* is a single-player story-based FPS with good dialogue and an excellent narrative. But with mixed reviews and its success at retail still unclear, it may be a while before we see another Japan-developed FPS on Xbox.

At least the Japanese Xbox gamers have spoken at the retail level, albeit in a tiny chorus. It took *Breakdown* only two weeks to surpass both *Unreal Championship* and *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* in sales and emerged as February's top-selling Xbox game. Here's hoping the Japanese aren't done showing us what they can do in the first-person perspective. //

Ryan Payton
Writer
Tokyo, Japan

W'HAPPEN?

It's another *XBN* flashback, dude!

WHAT'S NEWS?

Xpress revealed the first screens of *Mortal Kombat: Deception* on Xbox and featured first looks at Digital Extremes' *Pariah*, Sammy's *Iron Phoenix, MTV Music Generator,* and a sequel to the seminal *GoldenEye*, courtesy of EA. Also making their debuts were the "Final Exam" feature, which took an in-depth look at Namco's *Breakdown*, and *XBN*'s first-ever advice column:

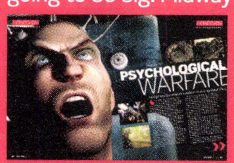
"Ask Itagaki!," which, we can safely assure you, is 100% real.

LIVE-ING THE LIFE

Epic's *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict* has quite a few tricks up its sleeve, including melee combat, first- and third-person combat, and already polished gameplay. Also in Live: the top 10 Xbox Live games, a look at Live 3.0, and the perpetually handy "Xbox Live for Dummies."

HIT OR MYTH?

XBN 14's cover story took a close look at *Fable*, the latest game from the always engaging Peter Molyneux. The verdict? It's almost here, and it's going to be big. Midway's *Psi-Ops* also looks good. Could psychic powers be the next bullet time?



BEAUTIES & BEASTS

Predictably, perhaps, Tecmo and Team Ninja's grueling *Ninja Gaiden* took Game of the Month honors. Midway's *The Suffering* proved to be surprisingly sufferable, while *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact, Baldur's Gate,* and Agent Bristow's interactive debut, sadly, were not. //

CALENDAR

SUNDAY 30

It's getting hot in here—or at least out there. Can't really blame us for spending that time with some great games, now can you?

MONDAY 31

TUESDAY 01

"Have you seen this girl? Please contact the center for missing Xbox adventure games."

06

So, it's National Headache Awareness Week. Kill the pain, then play *Stake* and *Aquaman*. Notice that? It's another headache...

07

08

Get away to the tropics with *ShellShock: Nam '67*. Or, if that particular little head trip proves to be a little too intense, relax with *Puyo Pop Fever*.

13

Xbox owners sans broadband unite! It's National Hermit Week!

14

Unfurl your *Xbox Nation* flag and fly it proudly for Flag Day! What's that, you don't have an *XBN* flag? A freak flag or the good ol' Stars and Stripes will just have to do then.

15

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Tapped out from all the great games, you realize it's Dad's Day! No problem, share a little quality time over *Halo*, let him win a few rounds, and all is forgiven.

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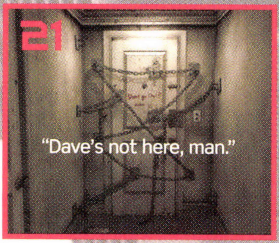

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Silent Hill 4: The Room ships today. Night-lights across the country work 24/7 for the next couple of weeks.

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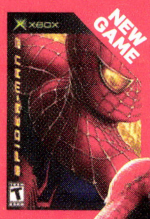

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THE MONTH AHEAD ON XBOX JUNE 2004

WEDNESDAY

02

DRIV3R and *The Chronicles of Riddick* top the lineup, along with *DroneZ*, *Hardcore 4x4*, *MTV Music Generator 3*, *Powerdrone Racing*, and the girl with the massive mallet, *Malice*.

THURSDAY

03

EA's Hogwarts Express pulls into town again with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, just in time for tomorrow's movie opening, which features...

FRIDAY

04

...a convicted mass murderer played by the delightfully fiendish Gary Oldman. Sounds like young Mr. Potter starts growing up today.

SATURDAY

05

09

Be all that you can be, virtually at least, with *Full Spectrum Warrior*. Or, feed your RPG cravings with *Sudeki*. Also: *Room Zoom*.

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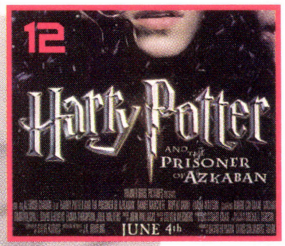

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Enough friendly games of baseball, time to break out *MLB Slugfest*. Or, catch *Around the World in 80 Days* with the Wilson brothers, Jackie Chan, John Cleese, and the Governator.

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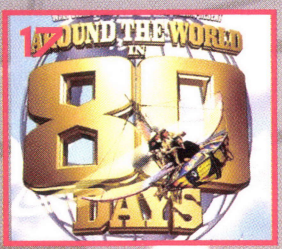

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Psychic powers punch up the stealth action in *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy*—but can they bend a fork?

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Go gunning for action in *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* or grapple with the oldies, complete with front man Jimmy "Mouth of the South" Hart in *Showdown: Legends of Wrestling*.

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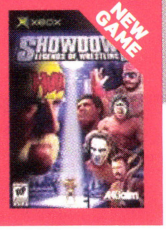

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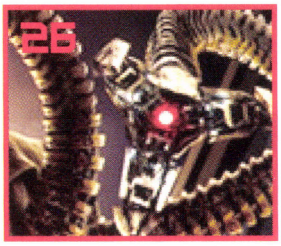

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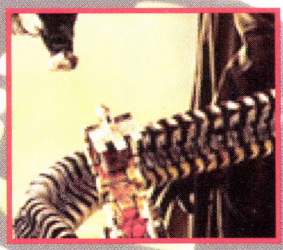
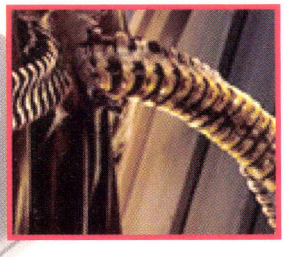
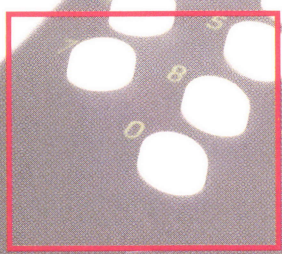
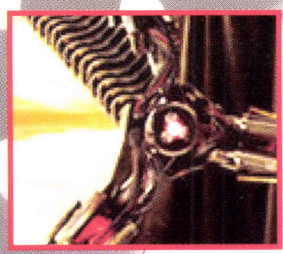
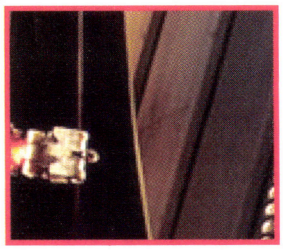
Parker pulls a Potter: The *Spider-Man* sequel ships today, just in time for the movie sequel's big-screen debut. If only MJ could see our webslinging skillz—yes, she would be ours.







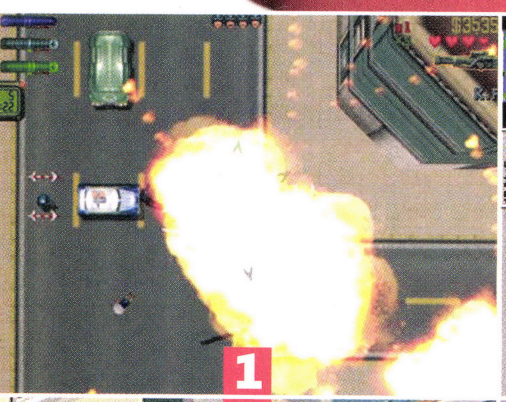




POP QUIZ // PETER MOLYNEUX

"I GOT A GREAT DEAL OF PLEASURE OUT OF WATCHING MY HOUSEHOLD URINATE ALL OVER THE PLACE AND DIE IN A POOL OF THEIR OWN VOMIT."

Photo: Matin Thompson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POP QUIZ

We name their influences. They tell us if we're right...

XBN talks tall tales with one of gaming's most celebrated game designers: Peter Molyneux, the father of *Fable*

1 Grand Theft Auto 2
Rockstar Games DC/PC/PS1

Peter Molyneux: I don't actually know what this game is, but I would be guessing it's...*Grand Theft Auto*?

XBN: Yes, it's *Grand Theft Auto 2*.

PM: I've never played [this]. I played *GTA1* and *GTA3*, and I think it's an amazing accomplishment that they took this and made *GTA3*. It's a leap of the imagination. There are very, very few people who have actually said, "Here's what the core of my idea is, and now I'm going to take a step forward into this real 3D world." *Super Mario 64* was one...I mean, that was a great relief.

XBN: We chose this because it reminds us a bit of your game *Syndicate*...

PM: Interesting that you should say *Syndicate*. I mean, that was the idea of *Syndicate*, to have this real city there and these civilians that are just incidental fodder, and then give the player lots of big guns to cause havoc around the world and give you some people to get caught in the crossfire. My most endearing memory about *Syndicate* is, you know, we took the bloodshed pretty high, especially for those days. The graphics were OK, but nothing compared to these days. There was one step we couldn't go beyond: You could never shoot the puppy dogs. But it didn't matter if you killed a baby in the crowd—that was fine.

2 Civilization
MicroProse Amiga/PC/PS

PM: *Civilization*, isn't it?

XBN: It is.

PM: For me, *Civilization* was a feeling of power. The graphics didn't matter a damn, what mattered was taking this little city up to this huge, huge metropolis. I mean, that was fantastic. I think I probably played *Civilization II* the most. For me, it's the computer-game equivalent of crack cocaine.

XBN: *Civilization* takes a macro approach, while you take a more micro approach—one where you can see the people.

PM: That's always been an ambition for me, actually. *Populous* started in a very macro way, it was sort of a world you were dealing with. And *Powermonger*, which was probably the worst game I've made, attempted to take it down to sort of a country level, and *Syndicate* was a city, even. *Theme Park* you could think of as a closer scale, and *Dungeon Keeper* was closer again. And then I pulled back a little bit with *Black & White*. *Fable* is much, much more personal. There's an absolute progression, and there is a plan to go down to the most micro level of all, which is just one person. That's sort of the ambition: When we can simulate one person, I think that would probably be the most interesting role within this macro world.

3 Pokémon Red
Nintendo GBC

PM: That's...one of the *Pokémons*, isn't it?

XBN: It's *Pokémon Red*.

PM: I have played *Pokémon*. I can remember hearing about *Pokémon*, hearing rumors of *Pokémon* when it was called *Pocket Monster*. I never saw the game, but the idea of having a little monster in your pocket absolutely affected *Black & White*. For me, designing games is designing games for individuals, where people can be individuals, and I think *Pokémon* plays to that. I had this thing called a Tamagotchi, and I absolutely loved it. I looked after my Tamagotchi toward the end of *Dungeon Keeper*, so much so that all the people around me were so sick of hearing this little BLEEP BLEEP that in the end, the head tester on *Fable* drowned it in a cup of coffee. And I actually did weep tears; it was all very embarrassing.

4 The Sims
Electronic Arts Everything

PM: Yes, here it is. *That* game.

XBN: We couldn't let this one go...

PM: It's pure genius. The thing that's so genius about *The Sims* is that he dared to be simple. To be as simple as having a man and a family. And if I went to any publisher in the world and I sat down and said, "Hey guys, I have this great game idea, you look after a family and you get to do the dishes and clean up and go to work," they would just laugh me out the door. And he did it, by making it simple. And the fact that he made it simple meant that far, far more people have played *The Sims* than any other computer game. I don't know the official numbers...

XBN: Millions.

PM: Millions and millions. Pure and utter genius. The things that I love about *The Sims*, again, is some of the aspirational stuff. When I go in there, being an ambitious person, I max out on my career every single time, and I thought that little mechanic of having a career was great. The other thing is, as a designer, there are so many interesting questions that you face, and I think Will probably faced these questions as well. In reality, you shouldn't be able to take all the doors out and lock people in. That's not real life. Who cares? The fact is, I got a great deal of pleasure out of watching my household urinate all over the place and die in a pool of their own vomit. And that is true genius, it's terrific. I think this is the start of something which is going to go on for years, and hybrids of *The Sims* are going to go on for years.

5 WarCraft
Blizzard Entertainment PC

PM: Right. This is...*WarCraft*, I think?

XBN: Yup.

PM: Now, I said that *Civilization* was crack cocaine, but this is soluble dosing on crack cocaine, definitely. *WarCraft*, *Age of Empires*, and *Command & Conquer: Red Alert*...OK, they're all the same game with different graphics, let's be honest about it. But they're just wonderful things. What I loved about these games was building the ultimate army that could totally crush everybody. What I always wished in these games is that you could build up a place for your army that was safe and secure, like build up these huge walls. I really, truly believed when I started playing these that if I chopped down every tree and killed every troop, something special would happen.

I've always felt that real-time games were actually closer to an experience as a computer game than having turn-based, because, again, the world felt just a little bit more real. And it's also a fantastic multiplayer game, definitely one of my favorite multiplayer games, without any doubt at all. Even more than *Doom* or *Quake*, because you can definitely be strategic with that simple mechanic of building units.

6 Animal Crossing
Nintendo GC

PM: *Animal Crossing*, isn't it? I absolutely adore it, and I felt ashamed that my house was covered in cockroaches.

XBN: Correct. Your games tend to have similarly endearing qualities, like the dancing gods in *Black & White*...

PM: The thing about this is—if it had been set in a more real-world setting—it far surpassed anything in A.I. terms and reactive terms. The fact that you have to be there at a certain time of day was brilliant. I set my stopwatch to be there, and that's the thing that made me think, "This game is real." It intruded into my world. Suddenly a game was intruding, and I had to be there at 6:00 and that was it.

XBN: And of course, the game continues even when you're not there...

PM: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I love that idea. I think that's the essence of what I've always struggled to do in god games: It's that you are the whole world, the world exists to spite you. So if you go out for a cup of coffee, tough luck—the world's gonna go on, people are gonna live their own lives. Just because you don't want to be a part of it doesn't mean anything to them. //

ABOUT: POP QUIZ

Each month, *XBN* pops the quiz on an Xbox game designer. We show our guests a series of screenshots and let them identify the game. We then ask them to comment on that game's relevance—if there is any—to their own work. By discussing various external influences, we hope to gain insight into their own creative processes.

ABOUT: PETER MOLYNEUX

Lionhead's Peter Molyneux got his start at Bullfrog Productions, a company he co-founded with Les Edgar in 1987. After helping to create games such as *Populous* and *Syndicate*, Molyneux left Bullfrog to create Lionhead and set up its satellite studios Big Blue Box and Intrepid, makers of games such as *Fable* and *B.C.*

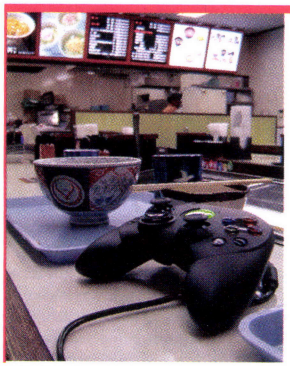
PREVIOUS WORK:

Black & White
Dungeon Keeper
Hi-Octane
Homeworld
Magic Carpet
Populous
Populous: The Promised Lands
Populous II: Trials of the Olympian Gods
Powermonger
Republic: The Revolution
Syndicate
Theme Park

WEIRD AND WONDERFUL!

Japanese Xbox promotions parodied

Xbox and Aoki Pizza's recent cross-promotion made the traditionally staid Xbox synonymous with egg and tuna pizza (see *XBN* #013). It also got the creative—um—juices flowing. Here are some dream Japanese Xbox cross-promotions far stranger (or are they clever?) than salmon, squid, and Xbox pizza.



YOSHINOYA

Japan's recent ban on U.S. beef has left this century-old restaurant chain scrambling to revise its menu. New curry and kimchi bowls have helped, though longtime customers no doubt miss its old, beefy staple. But thanks to a partnership with Microsoft, customers can straddle an even beefier U.S. export: Xbox. Beginning this summer, Yoshinoya's signature oval-shaped countertops will house system-linked Xboxes. It's almost as if the company designed them—50 years ago—with *Halo* in mind. Visionary people, indeed!

HIDEKI MATSUI

GameCube may have Ichiro, but Xbox has Godzilla—big, green, and full of fire. Since Matsui's MLB debut, Ichiro is *so* last year. And since Japanese baseball fans are more than happy to buy whatever Matsui tells them to, what better way to boost Microsoft's already unimpressive Xbox sales than with Japan's current home-run king? Expect Microsoft to soon start airing commercials showing Matsui hitting grounders with GameCubes and using a PlayStation 2 as a footstool in the Yankees' dugout!

OKAME NATTO

Many claim that Xbox is "too American" for the Japanese market, so why not turn the tables by scoring the most Japan-centric promotion ever? In conjunction with Okame, natto is now the official breakfast food of Xbox users! Natto, or fermented beans, is the most reviled of foods for foreigners visiting Japan. Its slimy texture and lethal smell keep foreigners far away. And with Xbox-shaped Okame Natto cartons hitting store shelves soon, Xbox is the single best way to get your game on—the native way.

NOVA

Popular English language school Nova has teamed up with Microsoft to form the ultimate English-teaching machine: Xbox! Thanks to the new Usagi software plug-in, the pink, adorable, and oh-so-educational Nova mascot will pop up onscreen with translations whenever a tricky English phrase comes up. So now when little Takuya hears "Your ass is mine, noobie!" over his Xbox Live headset, his parents can rest assured that Usagi will let their son know exactly what his brand-new American friends are saying.

CONNECTED

We came, we saw, we surfed

1 Top Scores:
URL: www.classicgamers.com

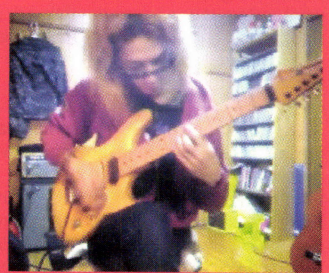
Featuring contributions from writers with credits at *Game Room Magazine*, TechTV's *X-Play*, All Game Guide, and *Comic Buyer's Guide*, the funky *Classic Gamer Magazine* is a 48-page bi-monthly downloadable PDF that covers videogames both past and present.

2 Subservient Chicken
URL: www.subservient chicken.com

Quite possibly the single best way to keep those damn kids off of the Internet, Subservient Chicken—with its filthy feathers, garter belt, and hideously scarred visage—does what you like. Submit your directive and watch it go. Hypnotic—and horrific, too.

3 A Break in the Road
URL: www.lukewhittaker .co.uk/breakintheroad/

Web games have come a long way. Take control of a kid with one shot to create a banging record. Armed with a Minidisc recorder, you must go out into London to record sounds and then mix them together at the studio. Nothing less than a *Flash* breakthrough.



4 Super Shredder
URL: http://mo-mus .com/mario.wmv

You know how the Web has all sorts of stuff that you can't believe exists, but you know does because you can see it right there with your own eyes? Like some Japanese kid playing the entire theme song to *Super Mario Bros.*, NOTE FOR NOTE, on his electric guitar?

BACK ISSUES

IS YOUR XBN LIBRARY COMPLETE?

Order these back issues to make sure that you have a complete reference library of the most valuable tricks, cheats, and codes for all the top games on your console. Here's how to order:

Simply check off which magazines you want and send in the order form (photocopies accepted) along with a check made payable to Ziff Davis Media, for the amount indicated for each magazine plus shipping and handling—add $3 for U.S., $3 for Canada and $5 for foreign orders—in U.S. funds only for each magazine! Orders should be mailed to: Back Issues, 1411 Opus Place, Ste. 340, Downers Grove, IL 60515. Price and availability subject to change without notice.

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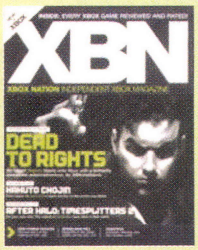

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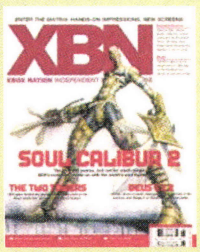

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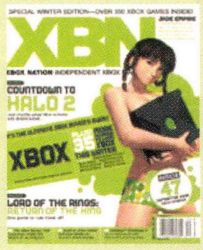

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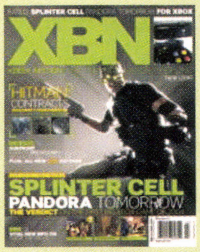

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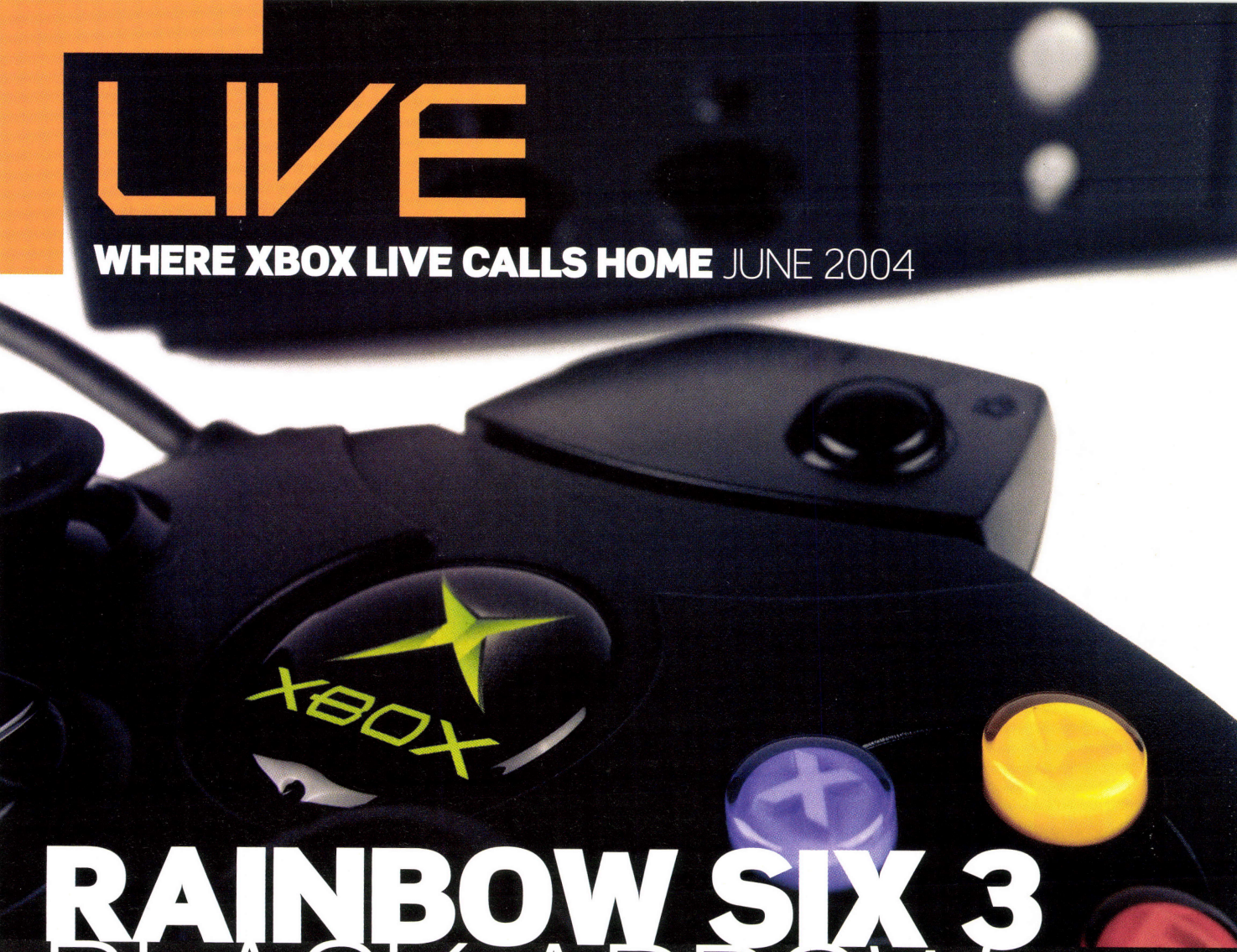


RAINBOW SIX 3 BLACK ARROW

When first-person squad-based online military shooters attack

After the recent announcement that it had signed a long-term deal to develop and publish games based on the U.S. Army's *America's Army* brand, Ubisoft has positioned itself as the undisputed king of military shooters. After creating what is arguably the world's most impressive online squad-based console title with *Rainbow Six 3*, the company now looks to up the antiterrorist ante with *Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow*.

Developed by Ubisoft Montreal, a studio whose resume is quickly becoming one of the most accomplished in the business, *Black Arrow* should be similar in terms of both look and feel. The game features an all-new single-player campaign, with "new diversified and challenging objectives, new weapons and equipment, and beautiful Mediterranean and Eastern European level environments." (One is reminded of the famous military mantra, "Travel to foreign countries, meet exotic people, and kill them.")

Aside from the host of expected technical improvements—better graphics, improved terrorist A.I., etc.—the game makes use of Xbox Live 3.0 in some exciting new ways. Players can create in-game competitions and tournaments; send voice and text messages to friends while playing using MSN Messenger; take advantage of new clan-oriented features, including clan statistics and competition; and use online storage to create artwork like arm patches, as well as save rosters and friends lists. The game also features new tactics for online multiplayer by

WHAT WE SAID:
Rainbow Six 3 // *XBN* 012

"Clancy's about to have his name permanently tattooed on the minds of Xbox Live addicts everywhere...*Six 3* stands virtually alone in its comprehensive detail and polish."

XBN RATING: 9.0

Look for lots of desert camouflage, head shots, and different variations of the color "sand" in *Black Arrow*.

offering new private team lobbies, where players can use a planning interface to develop strategies before jumping into an online match.

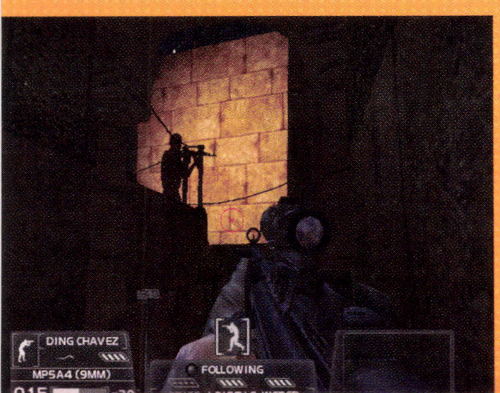
Also of special note are two entirely new multiplayer game modes: capture the point, in which teams battle to capture and hold designated points on the map; and the more traditional capture the flag mode.

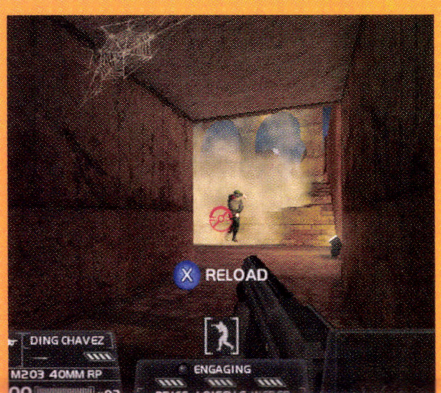
The story concerns itself with an international cabal of renegade military officers trying to create a war in the oil-rich regions around the Black Sea, giving them an excuse to swoop in and seize control. Team Rainbow (you and your friends) must stop the terrorists from developing their weapons of mass destruction and prevent them from starting a devastating war.

This hotly anticipated pseudosequel rappels into stores in August. //

SPLIT IT

One feature that was sadly (and glaringly) omitted from the original *Rainbow Six 3* was a mission-based co-op mode for the those without Xbox Live. Fortunately for you low-tech types, *Black Arrow* will feature a new splitscreen mode for offline two-player anti-terrorist collaboration, whereby players can tackle all of the single-player missions with a buddy and two A.I. teammates. Now, let's hope the A.I. is good enough so that you won't be able to tell the difference...





[MEN OF] MEN OF VALOR

A fireside chat with developer 2015's man of valor, John Whitmore

What initially impressed us about 2015's upcoming *Men of Valor* was the engaging campaign mode, full of the sights, sounds, and drama of the Vietnam War. As we all know, however, any first-person shooter worth its salt must provide an ample and compelling multiplayer experience; along these lines, *Valor* supports a cooperative mode and various multiplayer modes, allowing gamers to experience the war from the perspective of the North Vietnamese Army, Viet Cong guerrillas, or U.S. forces. *Xbox Nation* spoke with 2015's director of development, John Whitmore, about birthing his newest war-torn baby.

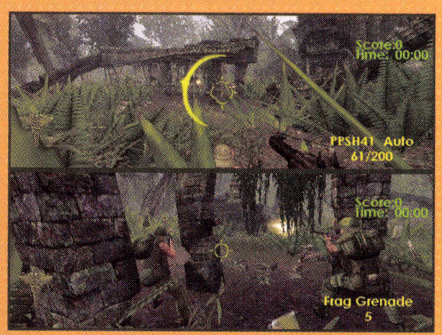
XBOX NATION: Some recent war games don't allow the player to control the side of the "enemy" during gameplay. Was this an important point for you, allowing players to control either American or Vietnamese soldiers?
JOHN WHITMORE: We knew players would definitely want to try out the weapons and personas of the enemy in *MOV*. The Viet Cong were very capable foes, and we thought we could generate some interesting gameplay by modeling some of their characteristics in our multiplayer classes. Communist forces tend to be more lightly equipped than the Americans and a bit faster when moving through the jungle. Some classes have excellent camouflage, making them perfect ambushers, and some classes have abilities, like placing booby traps, that expand the tactical options in the game. The communists' distinct weapons, like the AK47 and RPG7, were just too cool to leave in the single-player game only.

XBN: Currently, which online war games do you see as the best out there? What do you feel you guys have done to go beyond them?
JW: *Rainbow Six 3* is probably the strongest multiplayer game on Xbox Live—it runs well, and its very tactical gameplay really leverages the Xbox Communicator. *MOV* is a bit faster-paced and, I think, more accessible to the average gamer than *R63*. It has more diverse environments and supports 14 different character classes that have their own special abilities. The different environment types and character classes create a lot of gameplay variation, as fighting with riflemen in an urban environment feels a lot different from engaging sappers and guerrillas in a dense jungle. Multiplayer doesn't feel repetitive in *MOV*.

Another exciting Live feature in *MOV* is the ability to play through the entire story-based campaign game cooperatively with a friend.

XBN: Are you guys doing simultaneous split-screen/Xbox Live play? Would it really stretch the bandwidth limits of the console or connection?
JW: Yes. It just adds another player for the server to process, so two people on one machine is going to count as two players for performance purposes. We're not experiencing too many performance issues with this feature; you might lose a few frames when rendering two view ports on the same machine, but it's perfectly playable. I think it's great to be able to sit with your buddy in your den and attack another team over Xbox Live...especially when you have a widescreen TV.

XBN: Can you describe *MOV*'s search-and-destroy mode?
JW: This is a team-based game type where each team searches the map to locate three pieces of a disassembled mortar. Each team has its own mortar, and the pieces are spawned in randomly, so you'll never know exactly where all the pieces lie. When searching the map, you might find a part of your own mortar, which you will want to take back to your base; or you might find a piece belonging to the other team, which you will want to booby-trap or set up an ambush around. If you are carrying a mortar piece and are killed, you'll drop it, and your team will need to locate it again. The first team to bring all three parts of the mortar back to their own base can assemble it and use it to shell the opposing base, winning the match. This game type rewards stealth, misdirection, and other classic components of jungle-warfare tactics.



XSN GOES AWOL

Microsoft's sports lineup takes a season off

When gamers voted with their wallets last year, Microsoft's sports lineup took third place on Xbox. *Madden NFL* topped the 2003 charts with four times the sales of Sega's *ESPN NFL Football* and nearly six times Microsoft's *NFL Fever*. *NHL Rivals* and *NBA Inside Drive* took even worse beatings, leading Microsoft to take an unusual step. Its annual sports games will skip 2004. All three franchises will get a complete retooling to emerge more competitive in 2005.

"The market told us that there were fundamentals we need to do better in animation, presentation, and controls," studio manager Kevin Browne explains. "We accept that feedback, and we're working to make a significant leap forward to close the quality gap our competitors have on us."

All three franchises are going forward with the same development teams—Microsoft isn't laying anyone off. In addition, the decision won't affect the rest of the XSN sports lineup; *Links*, *Top Spin*, and *Amped* aren't on annual schedules, so their fates will be decided at another time.

Could Microsoft's decision be an olive branch to get Electronic Arts on Xbox Live? Ostensibly, the sticking point between EA and Live is cash, not competition. EA's John Riccitiello has always maintained that EA wasn't interested in making money for someone else. Microsoft collects the subscription fees for Xbox Live, while third parties simply accept the benefits of Microsoft handling the online arrangements for them.

Some, including Visual Concepts boss Greg Thomas, claim that the problem could be solved by the new Live Server Protocol, which gives third parties the freedom to maintain Xbox Live servers of their own. The word from EA is significantly less optimistic, however. EA representatives flatly refused to comment on any speculation about Xbox Live, and members of the *Madden* development staff at the company's Tiburon studio offered an even more convincing denial. As of early April, it is said, they have no plans to add Xbox Live support to their games. Putting Xbox Live support into *NCAA 2005* by its ship date, they said, would be virtually impossible, and adding Live to this year's *Madden* would be almost as difficult.

The consensus among most gamers is that EA Sports needs Xbox Live and that Xbox Live *really* needs EA Sports. But the dollars-and-cents realities of the relationship—particularly considering EA's cushy deal with Sony—mean that the prospect of seeing EA games on Live is still firmly up in the air. Sony's exclusive deal with EA does run out in June, however, and there are still consistent (though unconfirmed) rumblings that an announcement will be made at the upcoming Electronic Entertainment Expo regarding EA's online lineup hitting Xbox Live for the holidays.

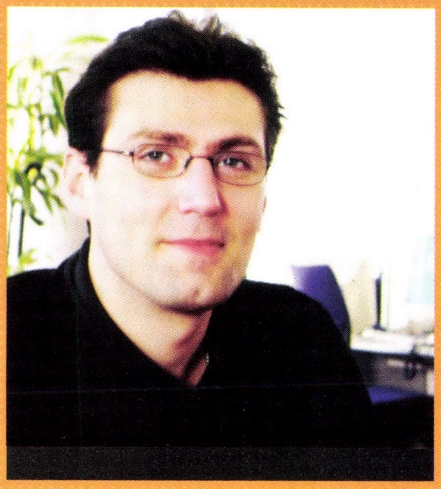
As for XSN itself, its features will still grace *RalliSport Challenge 2* this month; otherwise, you won't see it on Live until 2005.

TEAMTALK

DATEL $29.99

The Good: Cheap, reliable
The Bad: Noise a problem, of limited use to most

Has this happened to you? Three friends are over and you're playing *MechAssault* (or *Midnight Club II* or *Unreal Championship)* online with some German opponents. The only problem: There's just one Xbox Live account to go around, so your pals can't use their own headsets to crack wise about David Hasselhoff and sauerkraut. Problem no more! The TeamTalk comes with three extra headsets and an adapter with four jacks, so your friends don't need to shell out for their own Live subscriptions. And it works pretty well—voices can get muddled when conversations overlap, but it's a thankfully rare occurrence. Of course, your friends should really get their own Live accounts...



PANDORA YESTERDAY

A chat with the big brain behind *Pandora Tomorrow*'s amazing online play

An entirely new form of gameplay for the antiterrorism set, *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* essentially breathes new life into a genre that has maintained its status quo for nearly half a decade. *Xbox Nation* took a moment to speak with Ubisoft's Gunther Galipot, the man who made it all happen.

Xbox Nation: What's the most difficult thing about creating an online stealth game?
Gunther Galipot: To begin, it's never been attempted before. *Pandora Tomorrow* is the first multiplayer stealth game ever. Stealth games are very slow-paced in action, which is not really the most common form of online gaming. Stealth means avoiding confrontation, while online gaming usually means quick action and many encounters between players. So it is very different from classic online gaming orientation.

XBN: Give us one idea the development team had for *Pandora Tomorrow* that simply didn't work.
GG: At first, the team wanted to make the game a purely hide-and-seek game. For example, a spy is simply hidden, and the other side has to find him using clues. That proved to be too slow, boring, and frustrating for most players, since when you were discovered (or discovered your enemy), the game was over.

So we went in a direction that is split into two parts. The first is the hide-and-seek gameplay. But we added cat-and-mouse gameplay to [serve as] the transition between the hide-and-seek sequences. The game isn't over after you've been discovered, since there are always options to get clear and hide again...

XBN: Did you ever try making a co-op multiplayer experience?
GG: Actually, we [believe] that we do have co-op gameplay—whether a team plays as spies or mercenaries, the element of cooperation is always present. It's just simply cooperating against other human players. But if you mean co-op versus NPCs, we dropped this direction very quickly, as we found that it would be fun once, maybe twice, but that it would be limited too much by the limitations of the A.I. versus the capabilities and strategies that the human brain can devise.

Regarding current successful online games, what is important for an online game is reactivity—quickness of action—and life span. When you have renewed situations, you have more fun and you are more likely to keep playing.

XBN: Personally, what is your favorite multiplayer level in the game?
GG: My favorite level is Warehouse, which is one of the levels that can be played one-on-one. The principle of this level is very simple. It's composed of three areas. Each area is accessible only after the objective in the previous area has been completed. So this is very strategic and tactical, and it reminds me a lot of a chess game.

XBN: Why did you choose to limit the game to four players?
GG: It's all a matter of tension and strategy. When you have too many players, the action goes too quickly, [as do] random encounters, so it's almost impossible to anticipate anything. The last thing we wanted was random shooting from the mercenaries (like in classic online FPS games) and a rush toward the objective for the spies without any tactics or strategy, kind of a lemminglike attitude. So to keep the tension at the desired level, we limited the number of players, which makes sense in terms of continuity in the action.

XBN: Does it feel like there's a lack of innovation in the videogame industry right now?
GG: I wouldn't go so far as to say that there is no innovation, but there is an inheritance of the PC hardcore audience online, so there is kind of a status quo in new games that is focused on deathmatch and quick action, dexterity and reflex-based gameplay. I tried to bring something new to online. Something that makes sense online, but isn't classic in the deathmatch sense. In a way, there is a lack of innovation in terms of content and gameplay, and it seems like games are more and more oriented toward serving the technology—beautiful graphics, etc.—but the gameplay is harder to demonstrate [as a] selling point.

XBN: What had you worked on before this game?
GG: I've been working on various games, but the most famous was the *Rayman* series. Lately I've been working with the content-management team at Ubisoft headquarters in Paris. I worked on the PlayStation 2 version of the first *Splinter Cell*; I was in charge of controls and difficulty. I also worked on *Ghost Recon* for PS2.

XBN: Is there a genre or aesthetic in which you prefer to work? *Rayman* and *Splinter Cell* are, obviously, in many ways, polar ends of the spectrum. Do you simply approach all games from a pure gameplay perspective?
GG: Yes, I do have a preferred genre, but as a game designer working in the videogame industry, I am comfortable with all types of games; my approach is often from the gameplay perspective, whatever the genre might be.

I really loved 2D fighting games for quite a long time—SNK's *King of Fighters*, Capcom's *Street Fighter* series, and my all-time favorite, *Samurai Shodown.* One of the recent games that I loved was *Metroid Prime.* The last game I played (and still play a lot) was *Maximo 2.* I will get into *Gregory Horror Show* and *Final Fantasy X* soon.

XBN: So given your interests, is there any chance we'll see you take online fighting games to the next level? Nobody's done it yet...
GG: Perhaps. But there is quite a lot of work to be done to make online gaming more accessible for console players.

ON THE DL

The newest Xbox Live downloadable content, served hot

TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

DOWNLOAD: Quickmatch bug fix released on March 31.

WHY IT'S COOL: The best stealth-action game in years has an Xbox Live "Optimatch" and "Quickmatch results" crash bug in its retail version. This auto-update fixes this issue and was created in record time by Ubisoft developers. The patch automatically applies itself when players go online. Ubisoft also claims to be working on a second update that will improve features even further.

Bonus: Certain first-run copies of *Pandora Tomorrow* contain a free one-year subscription to Xbox Live.

Often-seen quote on *Pandora Tomorrow* message boards: "Where's the patch, where's the patch, where's the patch?!?"

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

DOWNLOAD: Three new multiplayer maps: Scharins, Close Quarter, and Meat Factory. Auto-update No. 2, which fixes issues such as the "hacked" gear room and the peek bug, is also now available. In addition, Ubisoft will be releasing an updated version of the Scharins map.

WHY IT'S COOL: Three new maps to take online and combat terrorism, just when you thought the world was safe. The new auto-update also fixes certain bugs that allowed cheaters to prosper.

From the *Rainbow Six* news room: "Due to the numerous issues in the recently released Scharins map, Ubisoft and Microsoft will be releasing an updated version of Scharins that will correct and fix the various bugs and issues. The map will appear as Scharins V2 in your Downloads section. It is recommended that everyone download this version of Scharins once V2 is released."

AMPED 2

DOWNLOAD: New Slopestyle DL featuring three new courses is now available. Blast your way through Pioneer, Sky, and Slopestyle 2003.

NHL RIVALS 2004

DOWNLOAD: Roster update (good as of March 2004) is now available for your cross-checking pleasure.

MORE GATHERING: BATTLEGROUNDS

What could be more *Magic: The Gathering* than more spells? Well, consider this: an online booster pack of hardcore archmage spells, with nothing in the batch coming out for less than seven mana. If you're used to staying alive long enough to gather that much mana, you're going to have to hit those books again—those spellbooks, that is. (OK, not funny.)

PLAGUE WIND
Sorcery
Plague Wind destroys all enemy creatures.

REIVER DEMON
Creature
6/6
Reiver demon destroys all nonblack creatures immediately when it comes into play.

TIME STRETCH
Sorcery
This sorcery causes the enemy duelist, the enemy duelist's mana generation, the enemy duelist's currently casting spell, and the enemy duelist's creatures to freeze for 10 seconds.

TIDAL KRAKEN
Creature
6/6
The kraken cannot fight other creatures.

BIORHYTHM
Sorcery
Biorhythm sets each duelist's life total to the number of creatures he or she controls.

LIVING HIVE
Creature
6/6
If the living hive deals damage to a duelist, it creates a 1/1 green insect creature for each one damage dealt, up to a maximum total creature count of five.

INSURRECTION
Sorcery
Insurrection gives the caster control over each creature, gives each creature haste, and makes each creature attack the enemy duelist until it respawns.

TEPHRADERM
Creature
4/5
If the tephraderm is dealt damage by any creature or spell, it deals equivalent damage to that creature or to that spell's controller.

SERRA AVATAR
Creature
1/1
Serra avatar has power and toughness equal to its controller's life total. Damage to Avatar still resolves normally.

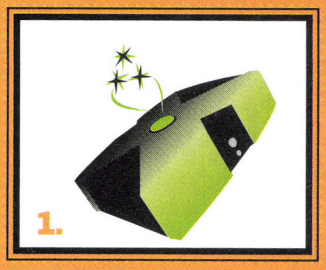
BLESSED WIND
Blessed Wind resets the caster's life total to 20.

4 THINGS YOU NEED TO GET ONLINE

XBOX LIVE FOR DUMMIES

XBN's official guide to a prosperous online experience

4 THINGS YOU NEED TO GET ONLINE



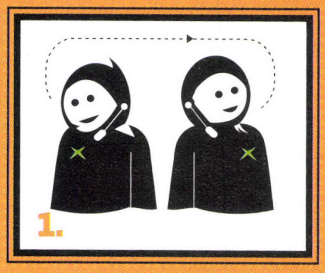
BROADBAND INTERNET ACCESS
Xbox does not accept 14.4K dial-up. Most ISPs work swimmingly—with AOL's high-speed cable service being one of the few exceptions. You'll also need a router if you want your Xbox to coexist with your PC online.

A CREDIT CARD
Xbox does not accept personal checks or gold shillings, so make sure you have your credit card handy. We'd make a joke about Master Chief never leaving home without his assault rifle right now if we were so inclined, but, fortunately, we're not.

AN XBOX LIVE STARTER KIT
These come in various flavors and sizes, but 70 bucks will get you a Communicator headset, a one-year subscription to Xbox Live, and a copy of the *MechWarrior*-inspired shoot-a-thon *MechAssault*. (Note: It's 50 bucks a year after that.)

THE ABILITY TO ENTER DATA INTO YOUR XBOX
Name, home address, credit card info...a few more things and you're ready to roll. Literally, 10 minutes and you're done dealing with it forever. Simple. Easy. Delicious. Xbox Live.

4 THINGS YOU CAN DO ON XBOX LIVE



TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS
It's an easy way to talk to your pals, without pesky things like "telephones" or "phone bills." There's an ever-so-slight lag at times, but this is the best way we know of to cheat the system.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS (AND ENEMIES)
Making friends is easy...especially when you can't see them or be seen yourself. It may sound creepy, but anonymous voice chat is a whole new way to socially interact. (You freak.)

DOWNLOAD NEW CONTENT
New levels, scenarios, items, and characters are available every week—just check www.xboxlive.com for daily scoops. Alternatively, check out *XBN*'s On the DL (page 47) for monthly updates.

PLAY THE GAMES
Duh. With over 70 games and 750,000 subscribers online as of January 1, 2004, the Xbox Live community will keep on growing. If you haven't joined already, now is the time—just be sure to leave your expletive filter at home.

USEFUL JAPANESE FOR XBOX LIVE

Their mothers must be proud. Not only do Japanese Xbox Live players remember their pleases and thank yous, they also apologize for cutting you off in *Project Gotham Racing 2*.

When you get tired of hearing American players profess "Whoa, I'm sooo drunk" as if it were a standardized greeting, join a predominantly Japanese lobby, enjoy their politeness, and expand your vocabulary.

Greetings: Yoroshiku!
Good evening: Konbanwa.
How are you guys doing?: Mina-san, genki?
Ah, nice one!: Yoku yatta!
Can you speak English?: Eigo hanasemasu ka?
Please add me to your friends list: Furendo Risuto ni irete kudasai.
Wow, you really suck!: Heta kuso!
Do you own a love pillow? Dakimakura wo motteru no?

XBN EDITOR CHALLENGE

Day or night, rain or shine, land or sea, the *Xbox Nation* editors are here to accept your feeble challenges. We promise to beat, maim, shoot, outplay, outrun, or outdance any and all comers; this is not a threat, but rather a grim reality. Tread lightly, ye contestants. Note: *Xbox Nation* does not accept responsibility for the hurt feelings and/or poor win-loss records of its victims.

// CHE CHOU
Gamertag: **CheXBN**
// GREG ORLANDO
Gamertag: **Motis**
// EVAN SHAMOON
Gamertag: **Giantmecha**
// DAVID CHEN
Gamertag: **RastaGundam**
// SIMON COX
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Gamertag: **Andrew XBN**
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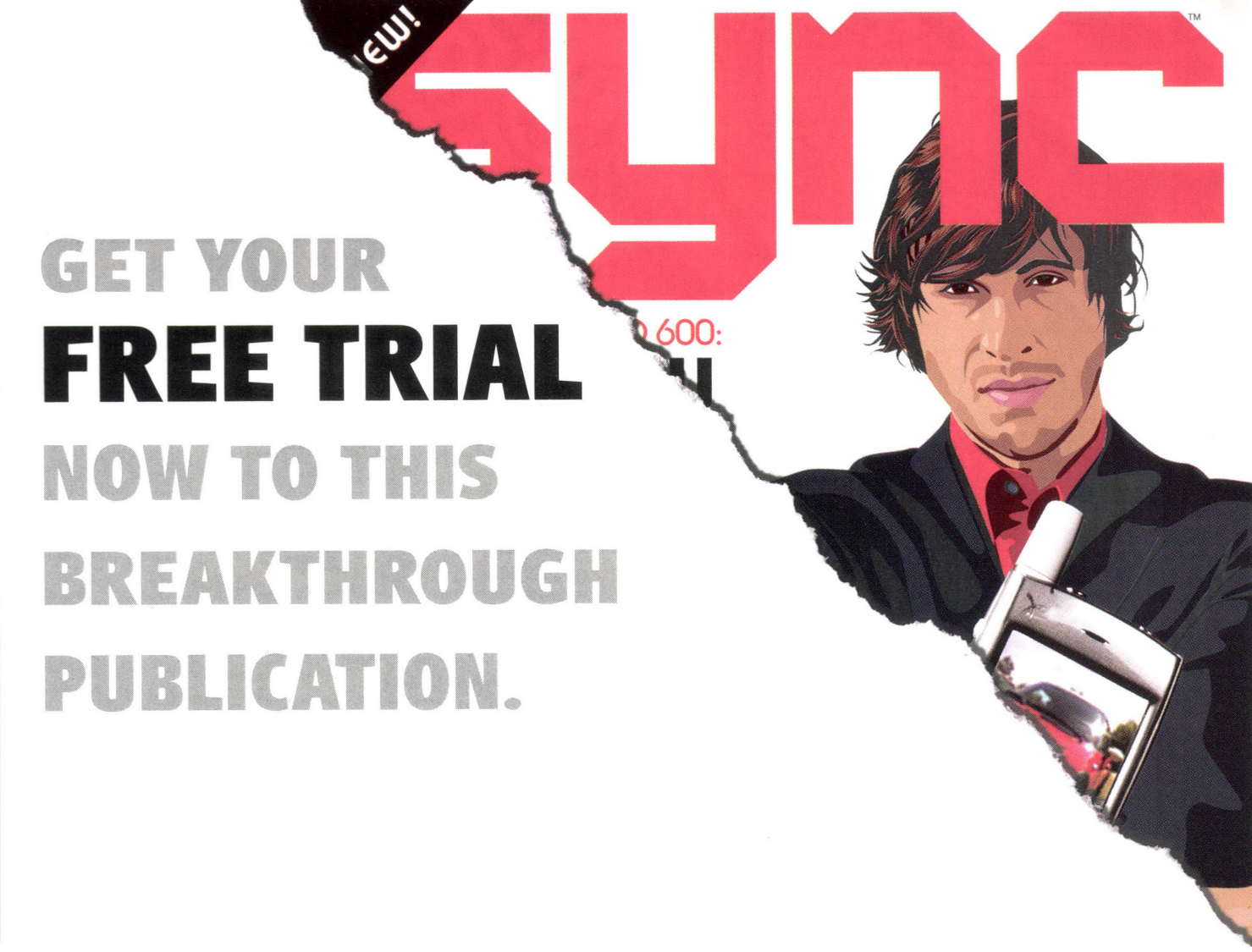
Gamertag: **BeatsNrice**



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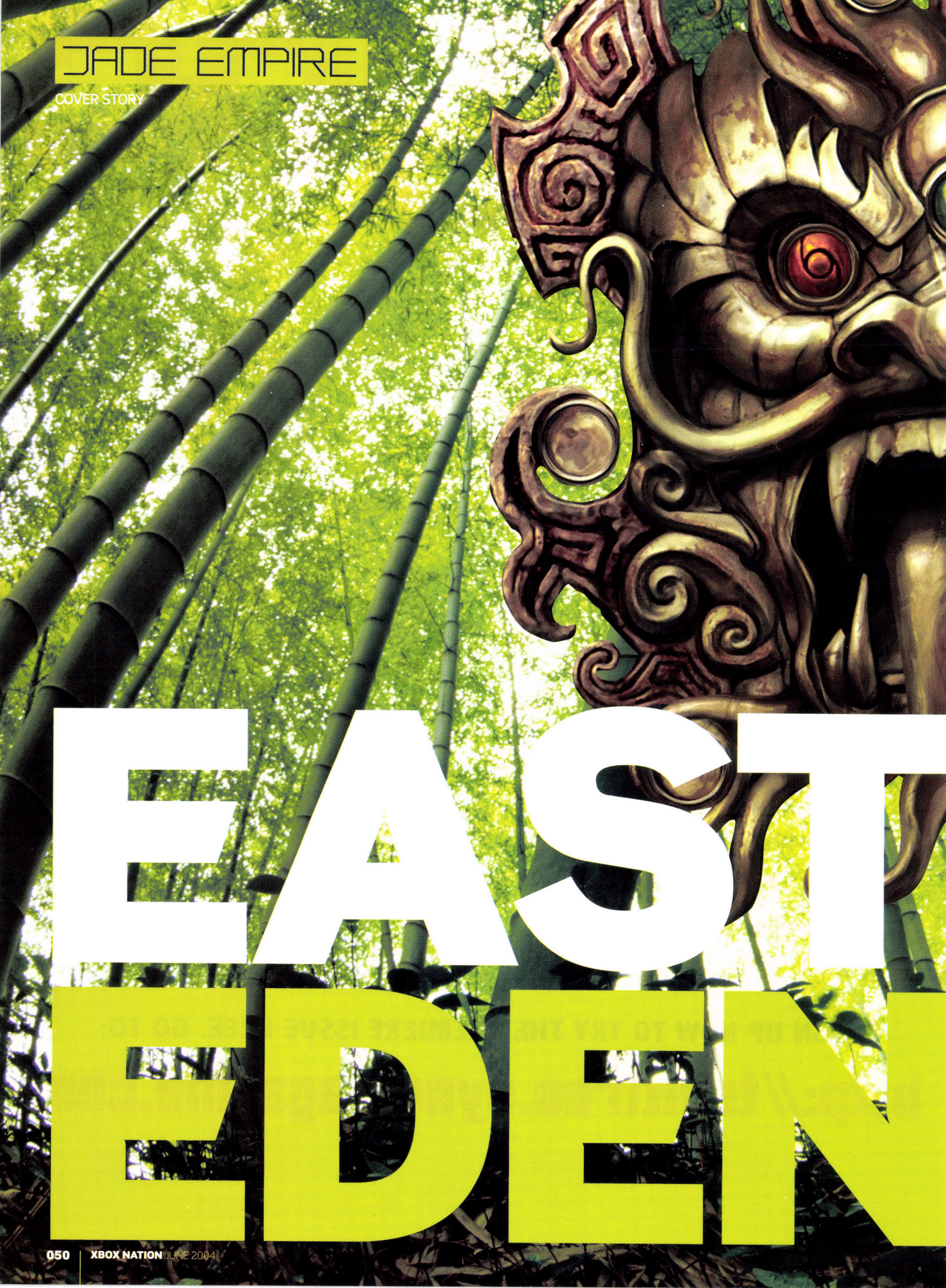
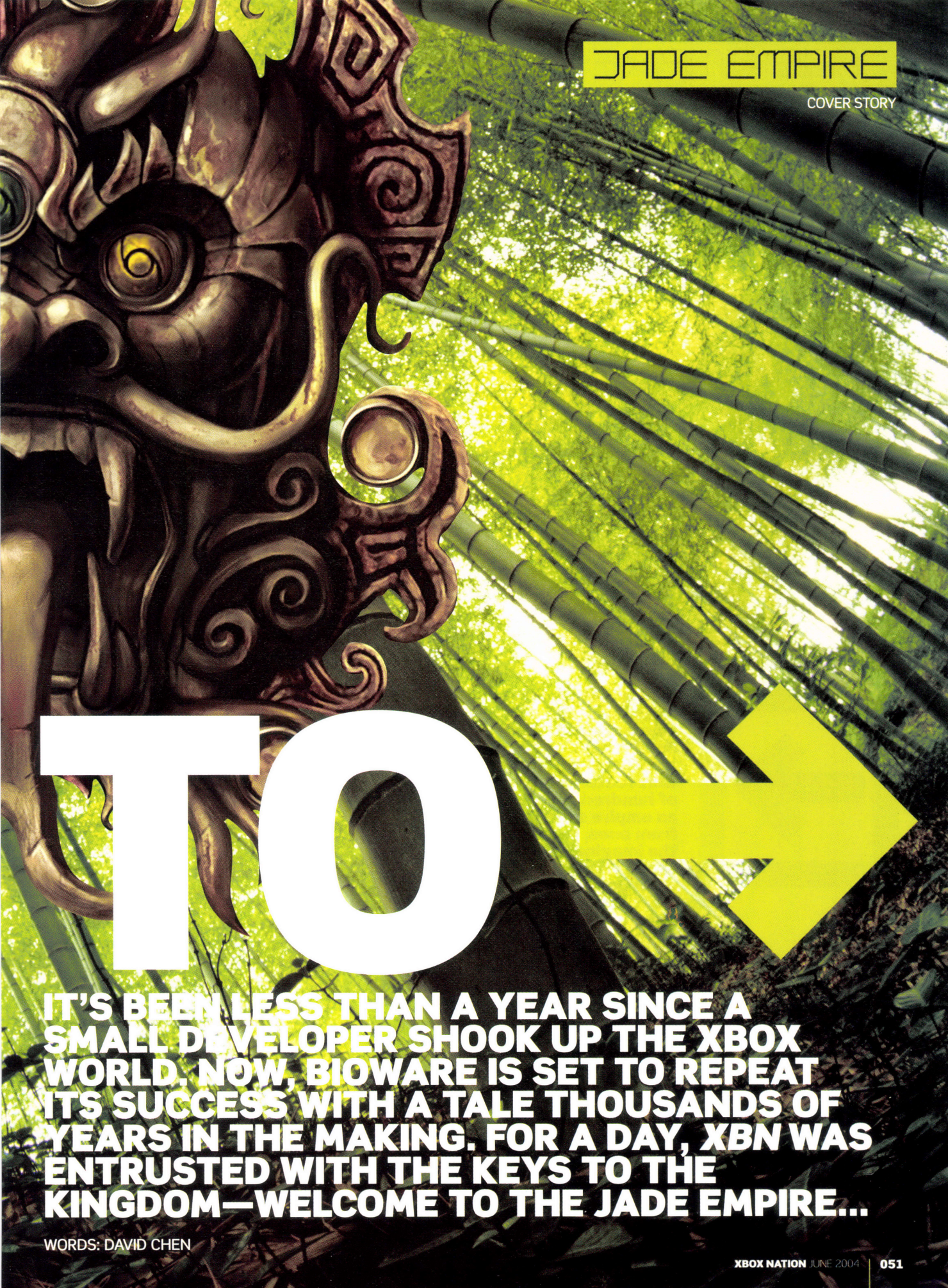


EAST EDEN



TO

IT'S BEEN LESS THAN A YEAR SINCE A SMALL DEVELOPER SHOOK UP THE XBOX WORLD. NOW, BIOWARE IS SET TO REPEAT ITS SUCCESS WITH A TALE THOUSANDS OF YEARS IN THE MAKING. FOR A DAY, *XBN* WAS ENTRUSTED WITH THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM—WELCOME TO THE JADE EMPIRE...

WORDS: DAVID CHEN

JADE EMPIRE

COVER STORY

Telling a story is hard enough; telling a good tale is even harder. But fabricating an ambitious, epic yarn that features a cast of hundreds and spans an empire spun simply from ones, zeros, and the imagination—that's the sort of work best left to the most skillful of storytellers, masters of the craft like BioWare. This unusual developer is based in an unlikely place and has followed its own nontraditional path to success.

Xbox owners know BioWare as the developer that secured the rights to the world's most blessed, most cursed license, treating it with a matchless mix of *joie de vivre* and appallingly good taste, as well as earning critical adoration, commercial success, and a whole new audience along the way. Xbox owners also know that the company's next big project is *Jade Empire*, scheduled (and on track) for release at the end of 2004. They know what it's about and what it will look like—and that its awesome ancestry ensures plenty of avid attention between now and when the game ships. They also might know, possibly to a lesser degree, how important it is for BioWare to show it can create a world that has nothing to do with—but is every bit as compelling as—a world of lightsabers, walrusmen, and making the jump to light speed. Still, in the words of Dr. Greg Zeschuk, BioWare's cofounder, co-CEO, and co-executive producer: "The game probably isn't what people are expecting."

THE SEARCH FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

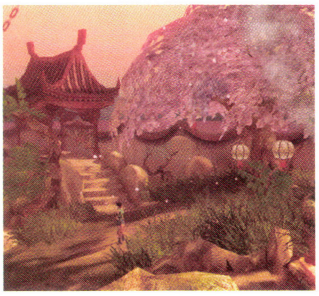
Gamers willing to go a little deeper for their interactive satisfactions know that little more than a few games dabbling in the rich mythology of China have shipped to these shores. Not surprisingly, few—if any—Western developers have attempted to bring these stories to life, and certainly none have been as ambitious as BioWare.

If the company has a public face, it's surely Drs. Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk, both former practicing physicians who have channeled their energies into pursuing a greater passion: telling stories through games. In person, they speak easily and with assurance, frequently completing each other's sentences and thoughts with aplomb. When asked about the impetus for creating this admittedly ambitious menagerie of mythologies both real and imagined, Zeschuk explains: "Part of it is impressing upon people that we can do an action-oriented game. A few years ago, we thought about this martial arts RPG and concluded that it's got to be about action. This is where we think the evolution of our games could be, at least on the Xbox." Muzyka elaborates: "We made some really specific decisions along the way: We wanted to do mythical China, [not] historical China. We wanted the freedom of having our own world and not having to stick with existing conventions—not a contemporary setting, but an ancient setting in the past. Myth, fantasy, all of those things work really well with our original vision, which was to roleplay a martial arts master."

ALL THE SPLENDORS OF THE EAST

In describing the denizens of the Jade Empire, Lead Designer Kevin Martens sets the tone: "They consider it to be the center of their world; anything outside of its boundaries is barbaric at best. They do trade with other people,

Located in the Imperial City, the Scholar's Court should prove to be one of the more tranquil environments in the Empire.



but they have a lot of disdain for them—they believe that they have the best food, the best culture, and the best religion." Although the team is quick to stress that East-meets-West scenarios will comprise a modicum of the story line, at best, players can expect to meet at least one "foreign" NPC—garbed in Spanish-style armor—but any confrontation with him will be intellectual in nature. Preparation for philosophical debate will be a must, and in this empire, there's only one place to seek out this sort of enlightenment: the Imperial City.

While the hovering home on which it's perched was first seen at the Tokyo Game Show last fall, this is the first time a lowly outsider has ever been permitted to gaze upon the Scholar's Garden—and it's suitably impressive. Nestled within the Scholar's Quarters in the Imperial City, it's a seemingly serene place, replete with lush gardens, elegant edifices, and meandering paths riddled with waterways. Misshapen rocks called "sprightly stones" bob in the air, tethered to the ground by chains. An enormous sculpted façade, Sagacious Tien, first and greatest of the Golden Age's emperors, keeps watch, making the tranquil courtyard by turns inviting, exotic, and ominous.

While the city and its courts might play host to political intrigue and backstabbing of every sort, the garden, according to Lead Producer Jim Bishop, is "where the most learned sages, the greatest artists and musicians of the empire would gather and take part in a very *Jade Empire* pursuit." Playing videogames? Not in this empire. Instead, one might find the erudite engaging in such scholarly acts as contemplating nature, discussing philosophy, or conditioning the body and mind—via martial arts, of course. If this sounds a little dry, recall that moral quandaries, the paradoxical nature of truth, and challenging players' wits are, after all, a BioWare specialty.

So how exactly can players brush up on their conversation skills? BioWare's long been celebrated for its intuitive handling of building character statistics as well as compelling dialogue—*Jade Empire* subtly and succinctly links the two. Whatever path a player chooses, he will find new dialogue trees revealed as his avatar matures: Building physical stats increases a player's ability to coerce NPCs, while bolstering one's mental capacities might enable the player to simply outtalk—or trick—the unwary. The most intriguing options come from increasing one's spiritual abilities, which makes a character more intuitive—allowing him to know, for example, when he's being lied to.

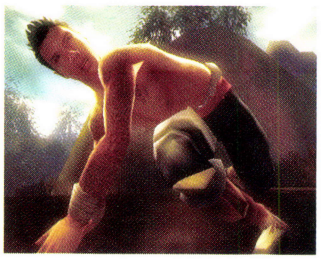
Far more menacing than the Scholar's Court are the Bandit Marshes. The inspiration for this area comes from a venerable Chinese collection of texts known as the *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Steeped in fog, the marshes are a claustrophobic array of muddy paths lined with weeds. When gamers get their chance to explore this menacing region, they can expect to face frequent attacks from brigands, rat demons, and worse. For now, however, it's ominously empty. Given the region's literary inspiration, a Robin Hood-style scenario seems hardly out of place—only the outlawed and the diabolic would inhabit such a place.

MONSTER MANUAL: ORIENTAL ADVENTURES

When it comes time to populate *Empire*'s myriad locales with foes to fight, expect the developers to bring plenty to the table. Some creatures, such as the tongue-twirling crimson-colored toad demon and the rat demons seen at E3—seem to have been taken directly from China's pantheon of fearsome anthropomorphic fiends.

FOLLOW THE LEADER

As previously revealed, *Empire* incorporates a Follower system. Dozens of characters, ranging from the awesome to the absurd, can be found throughout the lands, and each helps embellish the game's rich sense of history. In traditional BioWare fashion, some followers will be attracted only to the more pious of players, while others will be practitioners of the bad following the bad: Ninjalike assassins, for example, are sure to be of great value to certain unscrupulous players, while Kang the Mad, a wizened and bespectacled inventor (note the blast marks around his goggles), will have more constructive compensation to offer, surely.



BioWare's dedication to historical research is staggering: It even has its own costume department for reference.

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

When the game is complete, there's going to be no shortage of Empire for players to explore, certainly. Among the lovely environments to explore is a towering nest of seashore caves populated by pirates and scenic vistas. Another scene will be set in an elaborate roadside tea house just waiting to be trashed, conjuring images of an all-out *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*–style barroom brawl. Bring down the house!

"WHAT WOULD BE COOL? TO ROLEPLAY AS A MARTIAL ARTS MASTER. THAT WAS ENOUGH." —GREG ZESCHUK, BIOWARE

Other characters reflect more of the developers' artistic license. When asked about the towering stone golems that adorn early *Jade Empire* promotional materials, Jim Bishop admits, "We use him because he's cool, but he'll show up. Those are imperial siege golems. Nobody knows who built them, and there are only about a half dozen left." Not surprisingly, these fearsome war machines, which bring to mind visions of a brutal Gondor-style assault, are, in Bishop's words, "ridiculously powerful."

As Art Director Matt Goldman leafs through select pages from the *Jade Empire* "bible," a veritable army of foes is unveiled, from armor-clad zombies and terra cotta warriors to malevolent spirits and ministers of hell (a visit to hell itself was planned but dropped in lieu of the suitably spooky-sounding Land of the Howling Spirits). Clearly, players will have to master arts far more martial than that of the silver tongue.

THE GOOD FIGHT

By his own omission, *Jade Empire* Lead Combat Designer Aidan Scanlan is a fighting-game fan. "But," he adds, "I suck." This goes some way toward illustrating just what sort of strange beast *Empire* is—and will become. "We can't put a full fighting game into *Jade Empire*, because it's not a fighting game," Scanlan says. "It's an RPG. We're not catering [only] to the fighting-game people out there, so we had to limit the number of moves, keep it simple enough for anyone to do basic combos here and there."

Adds Jim Bishop, "I remember some of our early design meetings. Somebody raised the question, 'Is this going to be martial arts? Is it going to be weapons? Is it going to be magic?'" In unison, Bishop, Muzyka, and Zeschuk all chime in resoundingly, "Yes!" So what makes a developer best known for pointing and clicking think that it has what it takes to make this admittedly ambitious system work? Describing their dedication to making martial arts magic, Zeschuk says, "Sometimes when we set out to make a game, we pose this question: What would be cool to roleplay as? It'd be really cool to roleplay as a martial arts master—that was enough. As soon as you plant that seed, you can imagine how the rest of it would work."

Surely it's trickier than that, but in talking with Lead Animator Deo Perez, it fast becomes clear that this is the man for the job of animating the combat in a manner that complements both *Empire*'s source material and its unique gameplay mechanics. As Perez (who has studied tae kwon do, aikido, and, more recently, capoeira) describes bringing *Empire*'s combat to life, he assumes various fighting stances, nonchalantly snapping kicks and throwing punches.

To meet its ambitious plans for *Jade Empire*, BioWare has faced many new challenges. In order to portray the more than 30 fighting styles in the game, the developers utilized motion-capture technology for the first time. Initial trials were conducted at—of all places—the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton, but Scanlan says, "Once we had an idea what the combat system would look like, we made a list of all the actions we'd need. Then we went down to Giant Studios in L.A., and they hired all these really good martial artists and stuntmen. It was grueling—we had these guys going all day, every day [for five days], and we had performers in from as far as mainland China." In total, the team would come away with a staggering 700-plus animations. While most are still being fine-tuned (the team has found that speeding the captured animations by 30 percent makes them look far more dynamic), what's been revealed looks impressive.

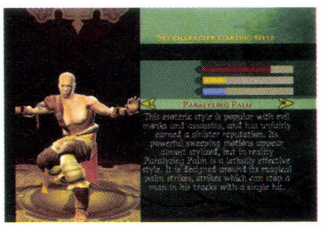
As he pauses to cycle through a staggeringly thorough collection of captured movie clips taken from "tens of thousands of dollars' worth of reference materials and DVDs"—from the ubiquitous to the obscure—Perez explains that he recently hurt his back. Spending one's days in front of a computer followed by nights of martial arts training has that effect, apparently. One can only assume that BioWare's many successes have come in no small part from this sense of passion and dedication.

IT TAKES AN EMPIRE

When asked to define just what makes BioWare so unique, not to mention successful, Muzyka responds: "We value humility. We value people who work hard, who are humble, who are really focused on making things great." That might seem obvious enough, but here in this quiet office, those words sound especially sincere. Even the quality assurance department, frequently a bottom dweller of the development world, gets the respect it deserves. Says Muzyka, "QA testers are incredibly important here—it's an honor to be a QA tester. They're the thin red line that prevents bugs; they make the game polished."

RAGGGH! ANGER MANAGEMENT IN ONE EASY STEP

E3 attendees privy to some time with *Empire* will have the opportunity to undergo a personal transformation of the most impressive sort: The lion-headed Chai Ka will be a force to be reckoned with, surely. Other forms scheduled for inclusion are a fearsome twin-faced ox demon, the mythical trickster fox, and behemoths in both rhinoceros and elephant flavors. You'll be able to assume the roles of several enemies they encounter, but don't count on an exhaustive list. The cannibals, for example, are about as soft and squishy as the little white marshmallows they resemble.

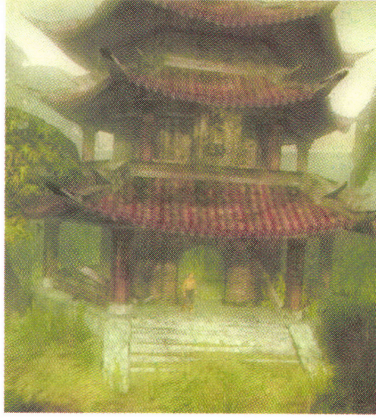


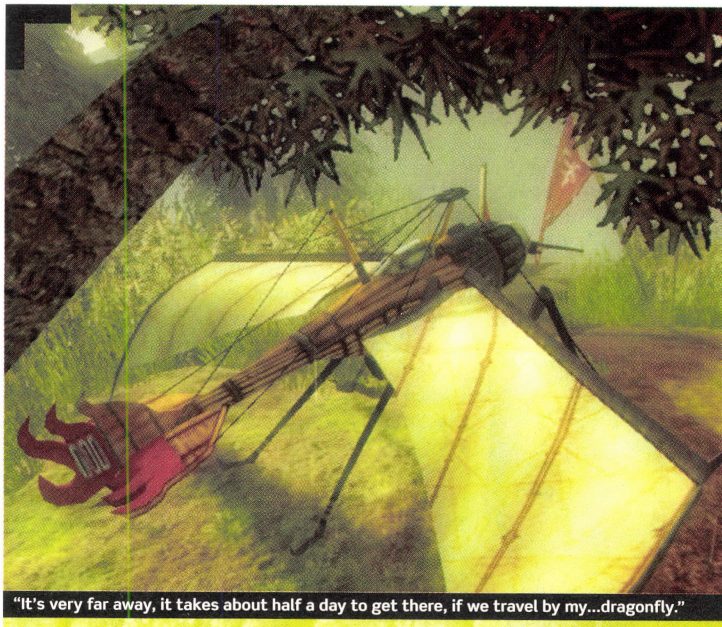
While players can opt to create their own heroes, they will have to choose from one of eight character archetypes.

JADE EMPIRE

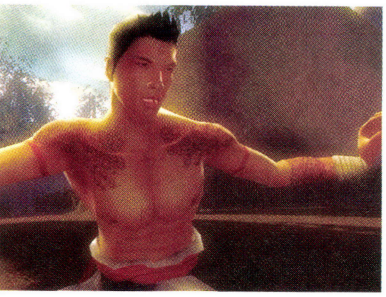
COVER STORY

Jade Empire is the first game from BioWare to feature cloth physics.





"It's very far away, it takes about half a day to get there, if we travel by my...dragonfly."



THE VALLEY OF FLYING STONES

CONCEPTUAL RENDERING

Even divisions of BioWare not directly associated with production appear to be equally in the loop. BioWare not only has its own in-house marketing and PR teams (unusual for independent developers), but also a deep familiarity with the games it pitches. Explains Muzyka, "Everyone here has to finish [our games] before they ship. They have to contribute bugs, think about why it's fun, why it's not fun; they have to be passionate about videogames." Adds Zeschuk, "We really see ourselves to a certain degree as the little guy. I'm sure people see us as this big, successful developer, but we see ourselves as competing with everyone else." Considering that the next closest developers are located in Vancouver—one province and 788 miles away—who can blame them?

EVERY LEGEND HAS ITS BEGINNING...

If the line above sounds familiar, recall that those words served as the tag line for the first prequel to one of cinema's most cherished franchises, one spawned a long time ago in a cineplex far, far away. Though that movie became a blockbuster in the traditional sense of the word, it was ultimately crushed by the expectations of its rabid fans. Could *Jade Empire*—with its Force-fed pedigree all but ensuring success—fall victim to a similar fate? Muzyka doesn't seem to think so. "We're only as good as our next project," he explains. "If our next product isn't better than our previous games, then what are we doing this for? It's not fun in that case—and it has to be. Audiences are more discerning now, so they're demanding higher and higher quality games. They know what they want." Whether "they" do or not, come fall, *XBN* expects "them" to start living their own legends, making their own myths, and—with any luck—telling their own tales. //

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

So how exactly does one get from the heights of the Imperial City to the depths of the Bandit Marshes? By airship, naturally. As it turns out, the gilded dragonfly seen in previous trailers won't be the only means of transportation for players, although it will likely be the best. *XBN* sneaked a peek at a smaller, more rickety (and most likely faster) vehicle with a profile like that of a certain bloodsucking pest. Says Lead Producer Jim Bishop, "You can think of this as the Dragonfly Mark 1. It's like a mosquito: It's fast, it's very dangerous, and it's lightly armed. When you first start traveling around, this is the first vehicle you'll be able to use to move around the world." Whether they will be acquired linearly or be upgradeable has yet to be determined. But in any case, other airborne craft—using myriad mystical means of propulsion—are bound to appear.

PLAYERS CAN EXPECT TO GET THOROUGH TRAINING IN THE ASS-KICKING ARTS ALONG THE WAY.

Motion-capture performers include the stunt doubles for Keanu Reeves in the Matrix trilogy and Lucy Liu in the Kill Bill films.

MARTIAL LAW

Strategic combat gets a real-time kick in the pants

While there are many mysteries to be unearthed between now and *Jade Empire*'s release, the topic on most minds of Xbox owners is exactly how the combat system—oft discussed but not yet fully grasped—will work...

After some hands-on time putting Furious Ming, Wu, and Monk Zeng through their paces, it's clear that it's coming along quite nicely—the controls are suitably responsive and the camera up to snuff. More to the point, what becomes immediately apparent is that this game was and is clearly designed from the ground up as a console game.

Select your style...

Upon entering combat, you can select from one of four fighting-style slots with the D-pad—although you can feel free to swap styles on the fly. Some styles are better suited for getting up close and personal (Legendary Fist), while others are handy for keeping enemies at bay (Spear). Mixing and matching is a must—even the most frail of magic users will want at least one martial skill with which to beat back opponents while charging their chi energy (magic).

The bare basics of brawling...

The L and R triggers cycle through potential targets or relevant objects (say, some spindly pillars that support the roof of a cave); most moves are used relative to the selected foe. The A button punches, while X kicks; simple combinations unleash different combos for each selected style. "Clear" moves are evocative of arcade brawlers, while "slam" maneuvers give you that extra bit of oomph. Blocking, rolling away from, or leaping toward (or over) opponents is as simple as hitting the B button.

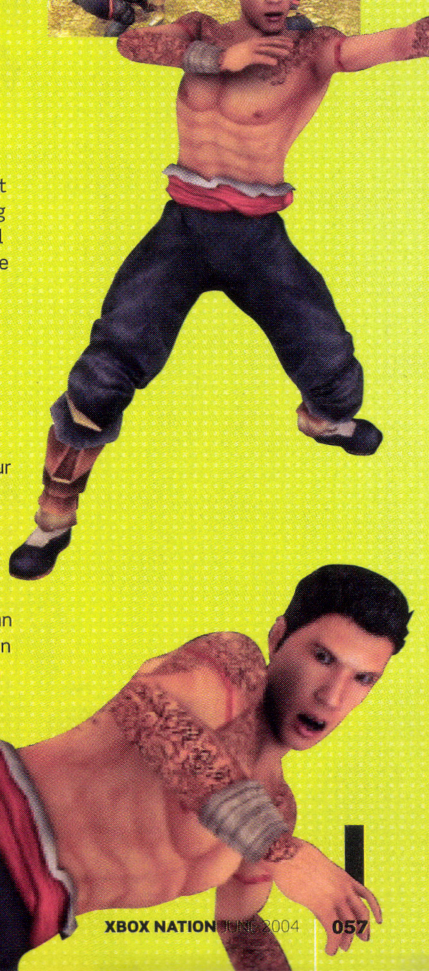
Mind your magic...

Furthermore, you will have to keep an eye on their chi (used to power magical attacks or the time-slowing focus mode) meters. Fortunately, chi can be filched from foes (both living and dead), and combat can be paused at any time by hitting the back button, enabling even the least dexterous to more deliberately plan out their next set of attacks.

Get ready to rumble...

So, a sample round of fisticuffs might entail keeping lesser foes at bay with a ranged weapon, casting a flame shield to ward off physical attacks, and stealing chi to restore health from a magic-savvy main opponent. To wrap things up, you might freeze the offending attacker with Paralyzing Palm before shattering him into pieces with a final, mighty blow.

If throwing punches, switching styles, slowing time, watching your chi, and jumping over errant fireballs sounds complex, know that it is—and it's even more harrying in practice. Without the proper training, having even the most ample of abilities at hand can be a bit overwhelming. But you can expect to get thorough training in the ass-kicking arts along the way—they'll need it. //



YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Ubisoft is retooling *Far Cry*—the best-looking PC game yet—for Xbox. And nothing is sacred.

Greg Gobbi looks at once both terminally exhausted and youthfully energetic. He rubs his face as he reads the results of the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' Interactive Achievement Awards, where last night, Ubisoft's *Prince of Persia* scooped an impressive eight gongs, including Console Game of the Year. Gobbi is a happy man today. As studio boss for Ubisoft Montreal, he green-lit the Prince and felt the heat last year when initial sales fell short of expectations. They've been climbing steadily since, and as of February, they had breached the two million mark. Sighs of relief all around.

"We knew it was very much a risky project," Gobbi recalls. "We feared what we call 'the *Ico* nightmare,' where we'd make a fantastic game that wouldn't sell. But we tried to be as innovative as we could—as we wanted to be—within the action-adventure genre, because that's really our roots."

Innovation and creativity seem to be in the water at Ubisoft these days. A revitalized *Prince of Persia* made the 3D-platform genre look justifiably prehistoric, and most recently, *Pandora Tomorrow*'s superb take on multiplayer added another dimension to an already perfectly rounded game. And to the delight of this magazine and countless Special Ops fans eager to relive their favorite movie moments from *The Rock*, the French Canadians also took the high road with their Xbox version of *Rainbow Six 3*; it was created from scratch with Xbox in mind.

"Yes, that game was loosely based on *Rainbow Six 3* for PC," Gobbi explains. "To be unique on the console, you have to have this attitude. You have to say, 'OK, this is an Xbox game, how can I make it successful?'"

Gobbi hopes to work the same magic with *Far Cry*, a franchise in the making that the company picked up in 2002 from German code shop Crytek. The PC version, published by Ubisoft, is already climbing the sales charts. For the uninitiated, *Far Cry* PC is set on a tropical island in Micronesia (it's in the middle of the Pacific). Ex-Special Forces dude Jack Carver is pit against overwhelming odds as he strives to save Valerie (a damsel-in-distress journalist) from the clutches of an army of tooled-up mercenaries, a mad scientist, screwed-up mutants, and the very evil merc leader, Crowe. It is widely regarded as the best-looking PC game to date, thanks to its lush island locales and breathtaking detail.

The Xbox version, known as *Far Cry Instincts*, is being developed in-house at Ubisoft, just down the hall from where the next *Splinter Cell* and *Prince of Persia 2* are being produced. Which, as it turns out, is rather useful.

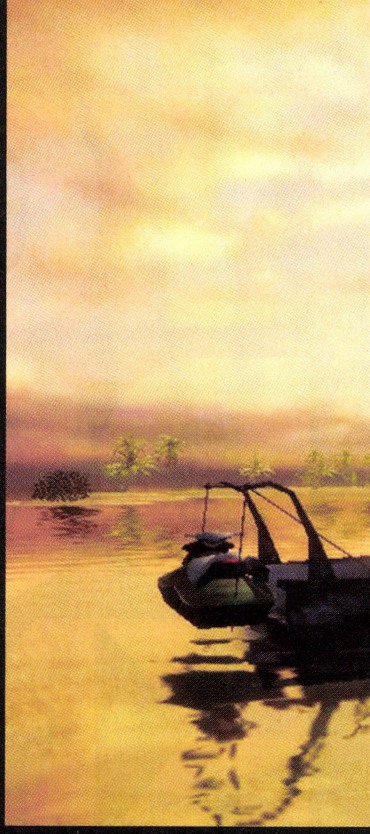
Superfriends

If you liked Sam Fisher, then you might be interested to know that Martin Caya, the guy who designed Fisher, is now designing *Far Cry Instincts*'

FAR CRY

FIRST LOOK

Despite the RAM limitations of Xbox (64 megs, in case you were wondering), it does a remarkable job with the jungle.



TALENT

Greg Gobbi

Executive Vice President, Content

Gobbi is where all the projects at Ubisoft Montreal go to get the green light (or the red), including *Splinter Cell*, *Prince of Persia*, and, of course, *Far Cry Instincts*. His laid-back approach to nurturing talent and ideas has made Ubisoft a force to be reckoned with.

"Over the last six years," Gobbi explains, "we've trained professionals in each area of the craft—animation, engineering, game design, sound design—so our games are very well crafted. A good idea done right is much better than a fantastic idea done poorly."

characters. Christian Duval is also fresh from *Splinter Cell*, where he worked on the atmospheric-lighting effects. If you liked the level designs of the original *Tony Hawk*, you'll be equally pleased to meet Jeff Hattem. He designed them, and he's now the lead designer on this project. And if you thought the Prince was pretty cool, leaping around those Persian palaces, you're going to like the way *Instincts* moves. The lead animators, like Francois Royer, are the same.

In the end, it took producer Roxane Gosselin three months to put the Xbox project's core team together, but once it was assembled, the ideas began to flow.

First, Jack Carver got a makeover. He lost the Hawaiian shirt, the Special Ops background, and about 30 pounds. The new lean Xbox version of the game's hero is now more Han Solo than Sam Fisher. As with everything this team does, there's a point to making him a bit less handy.

"He's charismatic—he's not a supersoldier," Caya emphasizes. "He's not always in control of the situation. The story brings him to these islands that he's not familiar with, and he falls victim to a series of events that will change him throughout the game. He's vulnerable."

Don't push me

That vulnerability is going to be important, and it leads to the second departure from the PC original. The game is now structured around a central concept that Gosselin describes as "hunter and hunted," which adds a significant new gameplay twist. Carver begins the game with a simple goal: survival (that's the hunted bit). But before long, something happens to him, and he begins using the enemies' weapons against them. He becomes the hunter.

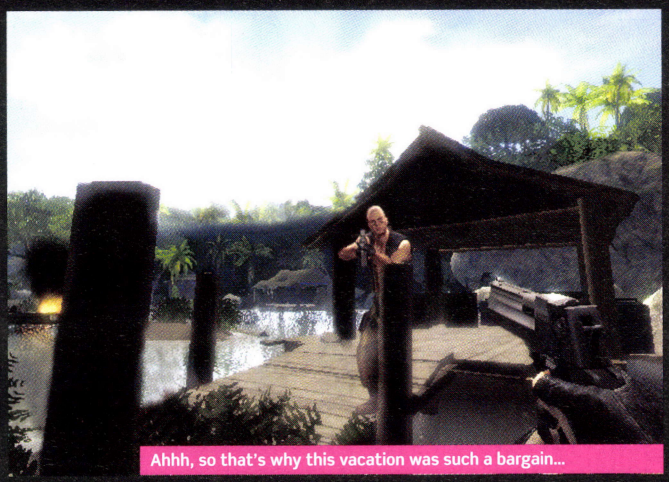
Caya, Carver's creator, who's also pulling duty as a game designer, explains: "We start with Carver, and you're going to be hunted. You are going to be the prey. Then we add something really cool: traps. You have to avoid them, and you're also trapped inside the jungle. In the CryEngine, the physics engine is really phenomenal. We make sure Carver is able to take objects, throw objects, which allows for a lot more interaction with the environment. You can take a table and kick it or [take] a chair and throw it on a merc, or [you can] take the body of a merc and throw that. So you have a lot of gameplay options. The first part [has you being] hunted by the mercs. You are going to try to survive, but you don't know what's happening or why you're here."

The traps may present innumerable headaches for *Far Cry*'s lead programmer (*Nightmare Creatures*' Frederick Condolo), but once Carver is able to begin using them against the mercs, suddenly, it's not just FPS business as usual. The game was already highly strategic, and the team hopes this will take it to a whole new level.

"You gain a stalking mentality," Hattem says, obviously relishing the thought. "You want to bait people into these traps and get the thrill of 'All right! I nailed him!' That's all part of being an agent of change in the environment."

When you can change the environment, you change the encounters. A well-deserved

Boats, Jet Skis, and other vehicles ensure that it's never just another day in paradise.



Ahhh, so that's why this vacation was such a bargain...

Fast friends: The *Far Cry Instincts* team sits it out. From the left: Roxane Gosselin, Jeff Hattem, Christian Bedard, Frederick Condolo, and (punching Jeff) character designer Martin Caya.

"YOU BAIT PEOPLE INTO TRAPS AND GET THE THRILL OF 'ALL RIGHT! I NAILED HIM!" —JEFF HATTEM

criticism of the FPS genre is that it can become repetitive, which is something the team seems, fortunately, more than mindful of.

Yippee ki-yay

"Have you seen *28 Days Later*?" Hattem asks. "The movie starts when the main character wakes up in a hospital, which puts you right in the setting. It's like the movie wakes up at the same time the character wakes up."

Don't panic—Hattem knows that games and movies are different animals, but he also recognizes the importance of the emotional journey, whether as a passive audience member or a fully engaged gamer. Likewise, both Caya and Gosselin constantly reference movies as they explain *Instincts*' feel. *Die Hard* (Carver is now wearing a vest...), *Predator* (buff army dudes in the tropics...), and *First Blood* (bandanna, anyone?) come up often in conversation. They do a good job of illustrating the emotional side of the hunter/hunted theme, since they all begin with a lone character who is seemingly powerless against ridiculous odds, but they all end with the tables turned. And much ass kicking.

"The focus is not on creating a nonlinear game. The focus is on creating the best experience so you feel like you're the one who's controlling the situation," Hattem says. "It's an emotional journey. Everything has to be playable. There are no cinematics—they are all playable. It's all about immersion."

That's great, but can you punch the sharks?

"No, and you can't ride them, either," Hattem says with a laugh. Same with the vicious, genetically modified Komodo dragons that roam the jungle (yes—that's another departure from its PC cousin). But with four seamlessly integrated islands to explore, more than 15 stages, and enough new ideas to make this version of *Far Cry* stand out from other shooters, there must be some limitations. If Gosselin's team has its way, the FPS genre won't be one of them. *Instincts* debuts sometime this holiday season, and *Xbox Nation* will bring you the first review... // **Simon Cox**

FUTURE

PREVIEWS AND IMPRESSIONS JUNE 2004

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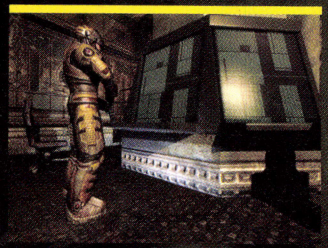
THIS MONTH

Is Xbox finally reaching wargasm?

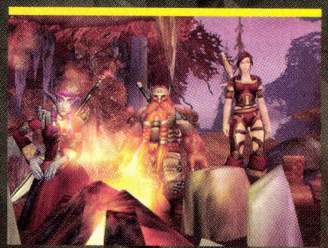
War—what is it good for? Well, if the past two years are any indication, humanity's unshakable curse is a hotbed for ambitious games that continually raise the bar on quality and immersion. This month, amid the sweltering heat of new title announcements is yet another batch of war-torn games for your camouflaged Xbox. It's as much a byproduct of our anxious times as it is a telltale sign of who you are as Xbox gamers. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that two of the top new military games are published by none other than Ubisoft, champion of innovative underdogs *Prince of Persia* and *Beyond Good & Evil*. But saturation and shellshock, no matter how virtual, can fatigue even the most stalwart of video commandos. Have we finally reached wargasm?

IN ROTATION: WHAT WE'RE PLAYING



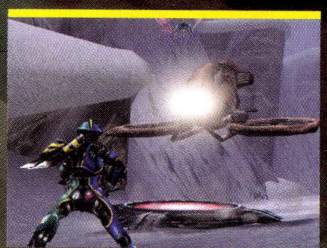
1 The Chronicles of Riddick Xbox

XBN's exclusive review this month has sucked more than one of us into its shiny, dystopian, bump-mapped world. Don't let the Vin Diesel factor fool ya—this game is hot.



2 World of WarCraft (beta) PC

If you're one of the lucky humans who got into Blizzard's beta test, then you'll understand why we're hooked. Featuring all of the good of *EverQuest*, with none of the bad.



3 Unreal Tournament 2004 (onslaught mode) PC

To quell our anticipation of *Unreal Championship 2*, we've been gibbing each other (and possibly you, the reader) in *UT2004*'s incredible onslaught mode. Buy. This. Now.

4 Metal Slug 3 Xbox

A true testament to the fluid beauty of 2D gaming, *Metal Slug 3* is the ultimate evolution of the genre *Contra* built. Hardcore and sharp, *Slug* is a real gem on Xbox.

XPECTING

XBN Readers' Top 5 Most-Wanted Games

To own an Xbox is to wait for the next big thing, and 2004 is undoubtedly the best year ever for Xbox games. Head over to our website (www.xbnmag.com) and rock the vote on the game you want most!

1

Halo 2

Microsoft / Fall 2004

Who'd have thunk a generic-looking spaceman with a goofy name like Master Chief would turn out to be the one symbol for Xbox dominance in 2004?

2

Fable

Microsoft / Fall 2004

Our cover last month must've struck a chord with readers because *Fable* shot up to the No. 2 position in a matter of hours. Peter Molyneux, don't let us down!

3

Half-Life 2

Vivendi / TBA

The truth is, *Half-Life 2* hasn't even officially been announced for Xbox—but Valve's main man, Gabe Newell, once promised its release on consoles.

4

Doom 3

Activision / Winter 2004

Doom is upon us, and we couldn't be happier about armageddon. Look for more demonic goodness next issue when we get hands-on with id's next masterpiece.

5

True Fantasy Live Online

Microsoft / TBA

Are MMORPGs finally catching a break on consoles with *Final Fantasy XI*? Recently delayed (again) in Japan, *Live Online* is now possibly a 2005 release.

THE DIRTY HALF-DOZEN

BE ALL THAT YOU CAN BE ON YOUR XBOX. *XBN* LETS SLIP THE DOGS OF WAR OF 2004...

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Ubisoft's latest—*Call of Duty* killer or dime-a-dozen shooter?

Not content with the successes of its *Tom Clancy* franchises, Ubisoft recently entered the crowded historical shooter genre with *Brothers in Arms*, an immersive and cinematic first-person shooter set during the second World War.

Man, are you for real? Another WWII FPS on Xbox?

We definitely hear what you're saying. With Electronic Arts milking its *Medal of Honor* series dry with a disturbing lack of innovation—and Activision poised to possibly do the same with *Call of Duty*—it's easy to get incredulous about fighting the good fight yet again. But developer Gearbox, which recently signed a 10-year deal with Ubisoft to pump out shooters under the *Brothers in Arms* moniker, has plans to reinvigorate the tired WWII subgenre.

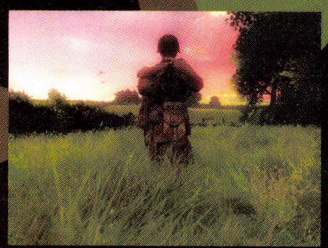
Why doesn't somebody just make a *Saving Private Ryan* shooter and get it over with?

Like Steven Spielberg with *Ryan*, Gearbox plans to dramatize real tales of combat and portray them from a gritty first-person perspective. *Arms*, the first of many shooters to come, follows Sergeant Matt Baker and his fellow paratroopers as they drop deep behind enemy lines on D-Day.

I don't buy it. What sets *Brothers in Arms* apart from the rest?

Aside from being officially endorsed by, among others, The National D-Day Museum, *Brothers* combines ambient scripted events and direct tactical command over your squad for a unique hybrid of heart-pounding action and deep real-time strategy. Historical accuracy and volumes of research make *Brothers* the ultimate WWII experience. //

DATA
DEV: **Gearbox** PUB: **Ubisoft** REL: **Winter**



GHOST RECON 2

Clancy the Friendly Ghost

As one of the first titles out the gate for Microsoft's fledgling online service, *Ghost Recon* is synonymous with the Xbox Live brand. But the game, with its lack of a first-person weapon model and decidedly ungritty aesthetics, lost its casual following over time. *Ghost Recon 2* aims to reclaim the military throne.

Yeah, *Ghost Recon* was a bit sterile about war, wasn't it?

No doubt, technological limitations kept the first game from achieving proper chaos and scope. For the sequel, Red Storm is putting the Havok 2 physics engine—the same technology behind usual suspects *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*—to good use. According to producer Christian Allen, *Recon 2* will employ real physics for objects such as vehicles, equipment, and environments (not to mention the lifeless bodies of fallen comrades and enemies).

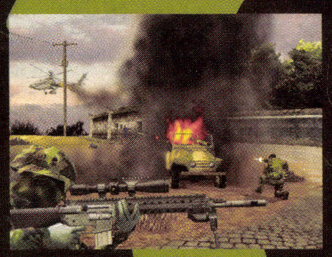
Well, these screenshots here don't exactly look next generation...

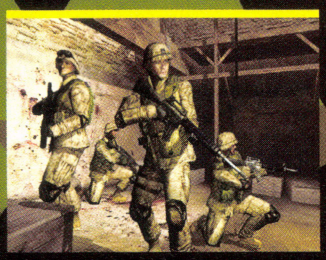
True, while these teaser screens show a game still under development, *Recon 2* should impress with its gratuitous use of bump mapping for amazing, photo-realistic effects. But the sequel is about more than just raw Xbox power. It is set in various East Asian flash points in the near future, and the art direction will favor a more in-your-face intensity, in terms of narrative and characterization, than in any previous *Tom Clancy* title.

Does this mean it'll be an on-rails shooter like *Call of Duty*?

Doubtful, as squad tactics and online play (i.e., full implementation of Live 3.0 features) remains the heart of *Recon 2*. //

DATA
DEV: **Red Storm** PUB: **Ubisoft** REL: **Winter**





CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR

What do you do after you've created a best-selling, genre-defining action game based loosely on every World War II movie ever made? You go and make another one, fixing your past mistakes. Developed by Spark, a team composed of more than 30 members from the various *Medal of Honor* games, *Finest Hour* is an original console shooter capturing the epic and mind-blowing scripted events of its acclaimed PC counterpart. With new campaigns across North Africa and exclusive new vehicular-combat sections, *Finest Hour* also features Xbox Live play for online grunts. How this game differs, exactly, from *Brothers in Arms* (opposite page) is still a mystery to many. //

DATA
DEV: **Spark** PUB: **Activision** REL: **Fall**

CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT

Announced as a teaser from Destineer, a studio featuring ex-Bungie talent, *Close Combat: First To Fight* is the latest bad boy to enter the lucrative war-games market. Set in contemporary times in some of the worst vacation spots known to man, *First To Fight* is the first shooter to have direct design input from U.S. Marines into what real combat feels like. A first-person shooter emphasizing realism as its design motto, the game puts you in charge of a four-man U.S. Marine Corps fire team. We're hoping to see the game turn up as a compelling hybrid between *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Medal of Honor*. //

DATA
DEV: **Destineer** PUB: **Take-Two** REL: **Winter**

COMBAT ELITE

Guns don't win wars. Little computer people that carry eight weapons at once and single-handedly mow down squadrons of Nazis do. Digital Joes like these saved the free world back in the '40s—and now you control one in *Combat Elite*, Acclaim's skewed, slightly isometric top-down take on the historical action genre. Don't let the signature Snowblind graphics engine fool you—*Elite* is anything but *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* with rifles and chateaus. From what we've seen (and played), the game's emphasis is on story, tactics, and drawn-out gun battles rather than RPG-esque booty collect-a-thons. Experimental and fresh, *Elite* is a welcome point of departure for the burgeoning genre. //

DATA
DEV: **Battleborne** PUB: **Acclaim** REL: **Fall**

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

Conflict finally hops out of the desert and into the jungles of Vietnam. Instead of having you control four highly trained Special Forces fellows, *Vietnam* has you commanding four trainees who unluckily get cut off from their unit. You have to guide these newbies through a long list of missions filled with vehicles, booby traps, and destructible terrain. Thankfully, these rookies learn a thing or two, since you can spend points in-between missions to develop skills like Sniper, Medical, or Leadership. The *Conflict* series is solid, but it's on the shallow side of gameplay. From what we've seen so far, *Vietnam* looks to continue its arcade heritage. //

DATA
DEV: **SCi** PUB: **Take-Two** REL: **Fall**

MECHASSAULT 2

Mech love—not war with Microsoft's heavy metal thunder

No matter how intuitive its *Halo*-inspired controls or gorgeous its explosive particle effects are, *MechAssault* feels like the hollow framework of a shooter that needs fleshing out. The game's main tenet, which relies heavily on twitch reflexes and repeated circle-strafing, turned *MechAssault* into little more than *Quake* with robot skins.

Which is fine for hardcore fans who, to this day, populate *MechAssault* servers on Xbox Live. But for the franchise's encore, accessibility is key, and developer Day 1 is rethinking gameplay from a ground-zero perspective.

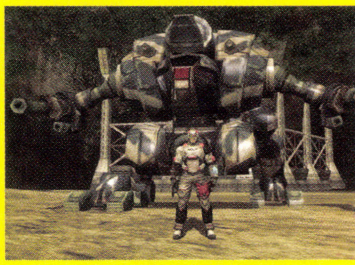
"Our mech games have traditionally always featured mechs and their various versions," Denny Thorley, president and CEO of Day 1 Studios says. "But what we really want to get across [in *MechAssault 2*] is that it's really about the pilot." Thorley explains that when gameplay takes place only from the vantage point of a mech, "you lose a sense of just how big and powerful these things really are."

The world in *MechAssault 2* is viewed from the flesh and bone perspective of a pilot—one who

XBOX LIVE

The future of online play

Just like its predecessor with the initial Xbox Live offering, *MechAssault 2* will spearhead the launch of Live 3.0 with its array of new features. When asked about the extent to which *MechAssault 2* will support an online community this time out, Dennis Thorley told *XBN* in a most serious and nonjocular manner: "I assure you [*MechAssault 2*] will be the poster boy for Xbox Live 3.0." We take this to mean that the game will support clans, competitions, voice messaging, and plenty of extra content.



can enter and exit a disparate mix of mechs and vehicles. To wit, our first hands-on experience with the game begins as a pedestrian in the midst of anarchy. Two clashing mechs are tearing the city a new one, and our goal is to haul ass through the fray and hijack a battle armor, a new man-sized and heavily armed exoskeleton.

Besides the added sense of immersion and scale, *MechAssault 2* also allows you to take control of nonmech vehicles such as stealth tanks, as well as a VTOL (vertical take-off and landing) troop carrier. While these different vehicles will, no doubt, play a big role in single player, each unit's importance really hits home in multiplayer.

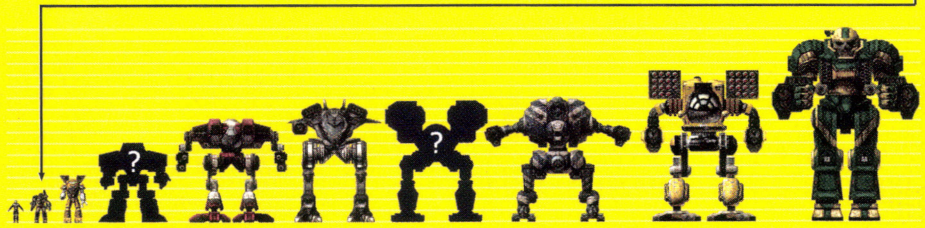
The VTOL carrier, for instance, can transport battle armors and tanks behind enemy defenses, as well as drop turrets and repair power-ups for other team members, while tanks, remembered fondly as missile fodder in the first game, are now much more useful, thanks to an added cloaking ability.

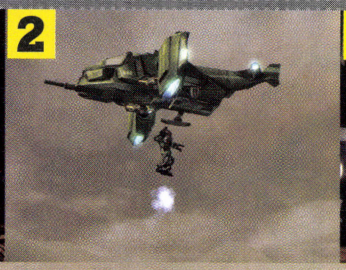
With all these new additions, Day 1 has given the franchise the depth it's lacked. *MechAssault 2* still handles like its predecessor, but the team has turned the series into an open battlefield experience where a mech's or vehicle's worth is weighed on a per-situation basis. Mech love, indeed. //

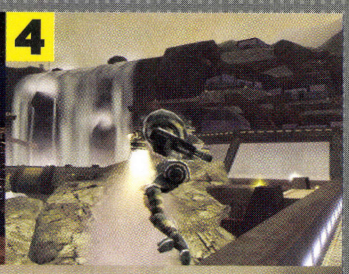
DATA
DEV: **Day 1 Studios** PUB: **Microsoft** REL: **Fall**

MINI ME-CH

The new battle armors in *MechAssault 2*: They won't take more than a few missile volleys, but they're fast and hard to hit, and they can climb buildings and jack your ride by attaching to the back of your mech.







30 MINUTES WITH...

MECHASSAULT 2

1 Our exclusive 30 minutes with *MechAssault 2* begins in the game's circular online lobby. Fashioned like a hub out of a Stanley Kubrick daydream, the lobby allows players not only to chat and organize upcoming matches, but also to see visual avatars online as they wave and do the Running Man.

2 We're split into two teams—us blue and them red—and tasked to wage war on a beautiful new map that looks not completely unlike the woodlands of Redmond, WA, with its lush forests and gorgeous waterfall. Immediately we hop into a battle armor and take a ride under the belly of a VTOL carrier.

3 The airship drops us off deep in enemy territory and takes on a nearby Uziel as a diversion from our vulnerable battle armor. While the mech is tied up, tangling with our airborne friend, we jump-jet behind the Uziel and attach ourselves against the will of the enemy.

4 The jack was successful, and we soon ditch our battle armor for a mech with some real firepower. Now, with both teams locked in a tense firefight punctuated by the occasional expletive from fellow players, the battle takes on impressive scope. We decide to go after the red team's landing pad, the source of its air support.

5 Unsurprisingly, the enemy base is heavily guarded with both automated turrets and a timberwolf, which effortlessly beats us into a retreat across the gorgeous, once-placid lake. //

DOOM 3

A shooter even Doctor Victor Von Doom can enjoy

Prepare to meet your doom for the third time as Id Software's seminal first-person-shooter series makes its demonic way to Xbox. Brimming with chain-saw-wielding zombies (*Resident Evil 4*, anyone?), pentagrams, Master Chief's long-lost twin, and truly next-generation graphics, *Doom 3* will undoubtedly redefine survival-horror for a new generation of gamers. As Id readies its PC version for release sometime this summer, *XBN* re-examines the dawn of *Doom 3* on Xbox.

Wait, do you guys actually have real info on *Doom 3*, or is this just an excuse to show off three new screenshots?
But...but...look at these screens! What you're looking at are actual Xbox screens from developer Vicarious Visions, the studio that's handling the port of *Doom 3*. Judging from these shots, it appears the eggheads at Vicarious Visions have figured out how to kick the Xbox into overdrive. Thanks to gorgeous pixel-shading and bump-mapping techniques, the graphics in *Doom 3* look mesmerizingly solid and dimensional.

See, you guys didn't have any real info after all!
Well, we do know a few things. For instance, did you know that *Doom 3* is a retelling of the original shareware episode? It's set in 2145 on a Mars colony, and your job as a space marine is to nail shut the gates of hell before Al Pacino rears his leathery mug in the far future. Also, having checked out *Doom 3*'s taut and suspenseful single-player missions, we were pleasantly surprised by the cohesive balance between scripted narrative events and all the action bits in between that propel the story.

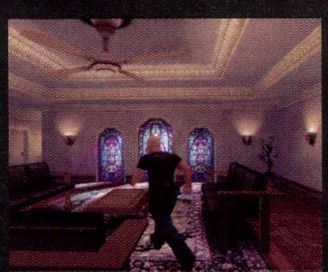
Will the Xbox port of *Doom 3* get exclusive features not found in the PC version?
For sure. Besides the four-player deathmatch you already know about, Vicarious Visions is hard at work on an Xbox-only two-player co-op mode for both on- and offline. //

DATA
DEV: **Id Software** PUB: **Activision** REL: **Winter**

THE SHIELD

Are you a bad lieutenant?

Gamers looking for moral relativism, take note: Protagonists don't get much more antiheroic than *The Shield*'s Vic Mackey. He's a loyal family man, a hard-nosed detective, and a masterful undercover cop...but his unique code of ethics allows him to achieve justice by any means necessary and also keep a cut of any contraband he recovers.



Is he a total jerk or what?
Like the TV show, the game roots itself in the desolate urban sprawl of Los Angeles' nastiest areas. As Vic, you infiltrate crumbling churches, grimy crack houses, and underground hideouts to weed out wrongdoers. (Your other squadmates provide backup on some missions, but you won't be issuing *Rainbow Six*–style squad commands.)

So they turned a hard-boiled drama into an action-shooter?
In a word, yes. But we're optimistic about *The Shield* because it's got such an engaging fighting system for roughing up criminals, as well as detailed background environments and subtle lighting effects. //

DATA
DEV: **Point of View** PUB: **Sammy** REL: **Fall**

SLEEPER GAMES OF 2004

WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING

4 XBOX UNDERDOGS YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

DATA

DEV: **Inevitable** PUB: **Midway** REL: **Fall**

AREA 51

We want to believe. You should, too

Area 51 is the latest in Midway's slew of complete franchise reinterpretations. Rather than provide another wholesome light-gun experience like its arcade counterpart, Midway tasked developer Inevitable with a complete gameplay overhaul. The end result is a taut first-person shooter set in a military complex.

Sounds like somebody's been playing a lot of *Half-Life*.

Indeed. Not only is *Area 51* a tried-and-true FPS, but from what we've played, it also kind of feels like *Half-Life*. You're a junior hazmat (hazardous materials) member sent in with a team to clean up a biohazard in *Area 51* when all hell, quite literally, breaks loose.

If it's *Half-Life* inspired, there must be a story twist, right?

Correct. Expect plenty of narrative-driven action, cut-scenes, and, hopefully, a cohesive plot that pulls you into the game's events. As you progress deeper into *Area 51*, the mutations you fight start getting smarter and weirder, and the base starts looking less human and more H.R. Giger-esque. Every sector of *Area 51* has a distinct look. While the game begins in your typical lab environment, it soon derails into supernatural chaos. Floating body jars and talking corpses are just appetizers for the main course. That is, if you don't get bitten yourself.

Sounds a bit like *Resident Evil*.

Yes, except getting bitten sort of works in your favor. Getting infected by mutants gives you superhuman abilities (a powerful melee attack, for example)—but you must temper your mutagen with your normal human health in a careful balancing act throughout the game. Midway is guarding the secret of mutation pretty closely, but even with just the normal combat stuff (i.e., guns), they have a pretty solid remix here. And yes, before you ask, there will be Xbox Live multiplayer support.

So how many players online? What about co-op over Live?

The developer hasn't nailed down online specifics yet, but they have confirmed the usual suite of Live options, from deathmatch to, quite possibly, co-op play. //

DATA
DEV: **GlyphX** PUB: **Majesco** REL: **Winter**

ADVENT RISING

A really, really ambitious game

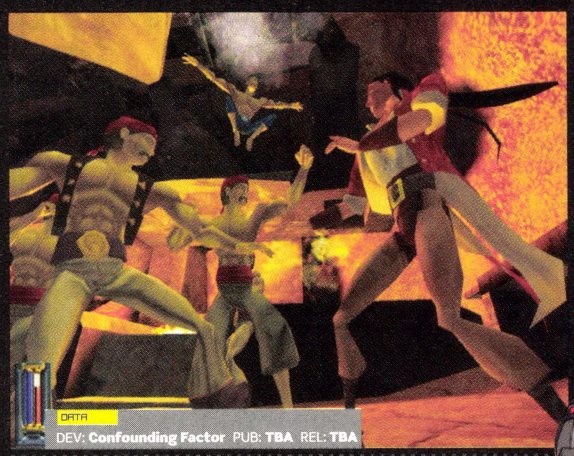
Here's an idea: cherry-pick concepts and create a game from some of the best titles this generation. Utter craziness, or the advent of innovation, when games as different as *Ico* and *Max Payne* finally come together? *Rising* is a game with that potential. At its core, it's a grand sci-fi adventure. With extensive use of physics, massive indoor and outdoor areas, and a wide array of weapons, psionic powers, and vehicles, *Rising* feels at once fresh and compelling. But is it too ambitious for its own good? GlyphX has already planned a trilogy for the series, while early playtests show a game that's more about ideas than refined gameplay. We eagerly await its arrival. //

DATA
DEV: **Bohemia** PUB: **Codemasters** REL: **TBA**

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Born to thrill—on Xbox Live

Xbox Nation plugs this game at every possible turn mostly because we know how freaking awesome it is as a deep, tactical war simulator. Like its PC counterpart (which won numerous Game of the Year awards), *Flashpoint* on Xbox will sport huge (no, seriously) outdoor environments, a ton of vehicles (including tanks and choppers), excellent A.I., and a cool story to boot. If this game ever comes out, it will own Xbox Live. //



DATA
DEV: **Confounding Factor** PUB: **TBA** REL: **TBA**

GALLEON

It's done! The game is finally done!

In development for more than six years, *Galleon*, designer Toby Gard's follow-up to his seminal hit *Tomb Raider*, is finally ready to set sail. But let's set a few things straight—*Galleon* does not have pirates, parrots, naval battles, or muskets. What the game does feature is fun (and deep) kung fu fightin', lots of superhuman feats (e.g., running up walls), and really really bad graphics. Stylized, strange, and innovative, *Galleon* is required playing. //

TERMINATOR 3: REDEMPTION

Enough to jolt the *Terminator* franchise back to life?

Redemption is what the *Terminator* license desperately needs, literally and figuratively, after the debacle that was *Rise of the Machines*. Paradigm's game—distinct from last year's Black Ops project—may not completely wipe away the memory of that fiasco, but at least it's a more respectable treatment of the material, with surprisingly fine-tuned and addictive gameplay to boot.

Has there ever been a great *Terminator* game? Ever?

Well, the arcade light-gun shooter was dumb fun, while PC gamers had *Terminator: Future Shock* back in '93. *Redemption* has the potential to join this illustrious list. The game plays out through a third-person view and offers players a good look at the Governator as he takes damage, gradually losing bits of artificial skin and exposing his metal innards.

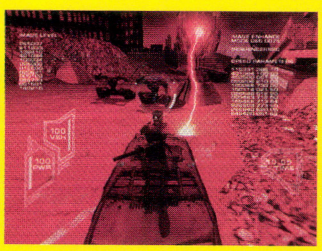
So we're a terminator shooting other terminators. What's new?

The game is ambitious in all the right places—without losing sight of the series' trademark tension and pacing. The one level we played entailed ripping apart other T-800s with guns, metal rods, and our metallic hands as we laid waste to anything that moved. Before the level was over, we had commandeered a truck and its turret, run full-force through crowds of terminators, and strafed the streets in a chopper. And that's just one freaking level of the game.

Whoa, sounds promising. What's with that red screenshot below?

That is the beautiful, but perhaps not altogether useful, "terminator vision," an optional view that lets you spot and lock on to enemies. *Redemption* is an old-school shooter in a brand-new skin. At any rate, consider the series *redeemed*. //

DATA
DEV: **Paradigm** PUB: **Atari** REL: **Summer**



METAL SLUG 3

The pixelicious art of war

The *Metal Slug* series exemplifies war games of a previous generation. Widely considered the zenith of side-scrolling 2D shooters, *Metal Slug 3* comes to Xbox in all of its pixelated, superbly animated, hysterical, satirical glory.

I've never played a game without 3D graphics! Help!

Don't panic, *Metal Slug 3* is the perfect game to ease you into a superflat existence. Essentially a sprite-for-sprite port of the Neo Geo arcade game, initial play has shown that *Slug 3* not only looks fantastic, but also plays faithfully close to the original. And don't worry, this is the best *Metal Slug* of the series, so you're basically getting your *Slug* essentials straightaway.

But what the hell is a metal slug?

The 2D series takes its name from a superdeformed tank in the game. The Xbox version of *Slug 3* will feature unlockable original missions and over 10 new slug vehicles exclusive to *Slug 3*—including the slug copter and the elephant slug, which comes complete with a trunk-spray weapon. //

DATA
DEV: **SNK** PUB: **SNK/Playmore** REL: **Summer**

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

First details on Team Ninja's online opus

With *Dead or Alive Ultimate*, Tecmo brings the series forward to its past and creates something wholly new: the world's first online 3D brawler on Xbox Live—and *Xbox Nation* has the first info on what you can expect.

Well, spill the beans already!

Ultimate packages the Sega Saturn version of *Dead or Alive* and the PlayStation 2 version of *Dead or Alive 2*, graphically reworked for Xbox using the *Xtreme Beach Volleyball* engine. Both games will feature full Xbox Live support. Online play happens over seven different modes, some of which accommodate up to eight players on a hosted server.

Won't all the various modes basically amount to nothing more than punching your fellow gamers in the neck on Xbox Live?

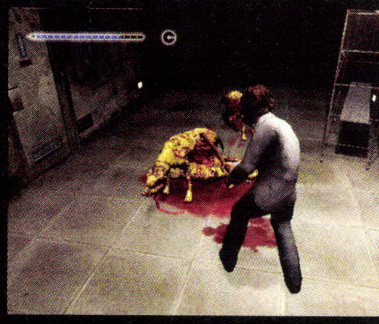
Ultimately, yes. But among the more tantalizing options is an arcade mode, where, just like in real life, eight combatants take turns fighting in 1-on-1 matches, with the winner staying on and the loser skulking back to the end of the line to watch and comment. In addition, there are tag-team battles and a tournament ladder mode. A worldwide simultaneous launch may well mean that *Ultimate*'s competition will be international.

Hot damn. That sounds awesome! More!

More will be revealed next issue when *XBN* goes hands-on with *Ultimate* at Tecmo's headquarters in Tokyo. Meanwhile, more than 103 costumes will be included, as well as new stages and leaderboards for *Ultimate* bragging rights. //

DATA

DEV: **Team Ninja** PUB: **Tecmo** REL: **Fall**



SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM

Konami's horror franchise finds room for improvement

Silent Hill 3's absence on Xbox remains mysterious. Was it due to poor Xbox sales in the developers' native Japan? Did *Silent Hill 2* Xbox tank at retail here in the U.S.? Some sort of satanic conspiracy, perhaps? Regardless of the reason, Konami has wisely opted to launch the latest chapter in its seminal horror series, subtitled *The Room*, on both Xbox and PlayStation 2 this fall.

What, another demonic trip to fogtown? No thanks!

Think again: Konami brazenly breaks from both the traditional *Silent Hill* narrative arc (person wanders to Silent Hill, gets warped to freak-out metaland, and comes to terms with personal horrors) and the series' established gameplay tenets in *Hill 4*. As main character Henry Townsend, you find yourself trapped in your tiny apartment. Your only escape? Climb through a mysterious hole in the bathroom that leads to the hideous "other side" of Silent Hill.

Some holes are better left unexplored, it seems...

"The fact is, in this game, your entry into the alternate world is entirely self-motivated," explains producer Akira Yamaoka. "And that choice ultimately has repercussions on your reality."

But I'm still wailing on monsters with a crowbar, right?

Actually, the gameplay in *Hill 4* has changed considerably from previous versions. First off, all scenes taking place in reality (mostly Henry's claustrophobic apartment) unfold exclusively from a first-person perspective.

That's nice, but please tell me they've changed the laborious combat controls.

You're in luck. The oft-maligned combat system of previous *Silent Hill* games receives a substantial upgrade this time around: "We've changed the gameplay drastically," says Yamaoka. "I wanted to improve the action aspects in order to increase tension, so I created a weapon gauge—it's kind of like a swing control for a golf game. You can charge up the weapon by holding down the button to increase the power of your attack."

So Tiger Woods versus the living dead, then?

Sure, why the hell not? In addition to the revamped combat, expect the largest arsenal of weapons and longest quest to date in a *Silent Hill* game, along with less cryptic puzzle elements in favor of more action and intensity. //

DATA

DEV: **Konami Tokyo** PUB: **Konami** REL: **Fall**

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GAME GROUP

X-MEN: LEGENDS

You could be heroes

X-Men: Legends, Activision's action-RPG (read: real-time combat system), pits Marvel Comics' most lovable mutants against Magneto and his unruly Brotherhood of Mutants.

An *X-Men* RPG with real-time combat? Sounds almost too good to be true.

If Raven can pull off everything they've promised thus far, the game will be spectacular. These X-Mutants can fight with bare fists, use their superpowers, and perform combination moves—such as Wolverine and Colossus' "fastball special"—in tandem with their fellow heroes. Players can select which X-Man to directly control with a single button press, while the remaining three squadmates are A.I. controlled.

And kicking ass in turn levels up my motley mutants?

Right. Combat experience translates to a well-rounded mutant. "Each character has basic stats that determine striking, agility, and so forth, and these stats are upgradeable by the player each time he or she levels up," says Rob Gee, Legends' lead designer at Raven.

That's cool, but how does the real-time combat system work?

Gee described a typical battle for us: "The team comes across a squad of soldiers who begin lobbing grenades from behind cover. Cyclops fires off an optic blast that knocks one soldier out of commission. Meanwhile, Iceman has frozen an enemy in place, and Wolverine charges in for the kill with claws extended (both under A.I. control). With a quick button combo, Storm unleashes a devastating lightning bolt that knocks out the fourth soldier before he can fire off more than a handful of shots." Mutant mania will reign this fall. //

DATA
DEV: **Raven** PUB: **Activision** REL: **October**

SUDEKI

The first Xbox RPG of 2004

British RPG *Sudeki*, having spent years incubating under Microsoft's first-party wing, is finally ready for the world. But is the world ready for *Sudeki*'s mish-mash take on the modern RPG genre?

I don't know, are we?

That depends. Would you rather have your RPGs with a side of *Final Fight* or without? *Sudeki*'s combat system feels twitchier and more combo obsessed than your average action-RPG affair. When the game's hero needs to switch weapons, execute punishing spirit strikes, and quaff a healing potion, he or she does so on the fly.

Sounds like you're an army of one out to save the world.

Not true. You can host a party of fantasy archetypes, whose unique abilities you'll need to bypass *Sudeki*'s environmental puzzles (like those found in the 3D *Zelda* games).

The game sure looks, uh, bootylicious.

Ah yes, brilliant visuals and an epic world submerge you into a warm tub of spiky-haired protagonists and bikini-waxed warrior vixens. //

DATA
DEV: **Climax** PUB: **Microsoft** REL: **June**

MEGA BITS

Little satellites of love on the horizon

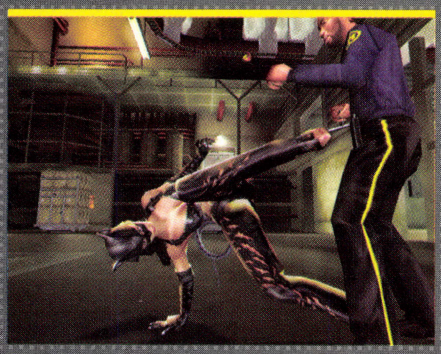
Resident Evil coming to Xbox?

Call it wishful thinking, or a misinterpretation of the facts, but there's been a surge of rumors regarding Capcom's *Resident Evil* series going multiplatform. From a business perspective, it makes sense that the seminal series should prosper through an expanded install base that the GameCube alone couldn't offer. The Xbox needs more undead love.

Backyard Wrestling 2

Having already lowered property values with *Backyard Wrestling: There Goes the Neighborhood*, Eidos has nothing to do but stage an encore. An all-new system is on tap here, one that includes submission holds, attacks that focus on body parts, location-specific damage, and defensive moves. Strangely, there's no word just yet if the game supports Xbox Live, as Eidos has already confirmed online play for PlayStation 2. //

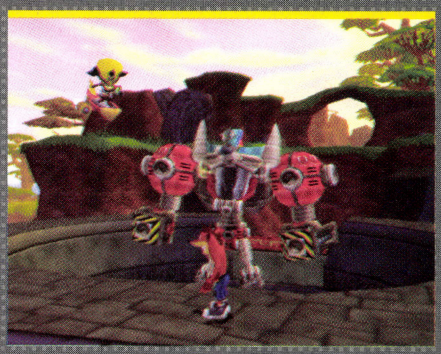
DATA
DEV: **Paradox** PUB: **Eidos** REL: **October**



Catwoman

Now with 100 percent fewer hairballs and feline leukemia, the 3D adventure *Catwoman* tells the sad and sober tale of a murdered woman who comes back to life (thanks to a rare Egyptian cat) as a whip-wielding heroine and foils crime with her "unique cat senses." It's based loosely on the events of the *Catwoman* film, which features Halle Berry in a ridiculous, yet irresistible, vinyl cat suit. Can EA work its movie magic here? //

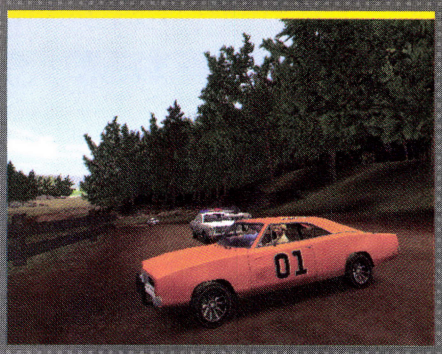
DATA
DEV: **Electronic Arts** PUB: **Electronic Arts** REL: **July**



Crash: Twinsanity

Behold, it's Crash—the bandicoot Xbox fanboys love to hate, simply because he/she/it was once a PlayStation 2 mascot. Well, as Microsoft learned the hard way with *Blinx*, we don't need no stinkin' mascots on Xbox! We want more military shooters! And racing games! Okay, not really. Crash is back, and *Twinsanity* teams him/her/it up with long-time nemesis Dr. Cortex for the best (and worst) of times. //

DATA
DEV: **Traveller's Tales** PUB: **Vivendi** REL: **September**



The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee

Ubisoft certainly knows how to keep us on our toes. Just when we thought it was the eternal champion of everything good and artistic, it springs those wacky boys from Hazzard County on us. Based on a mysteriously popular TV show about hicks and hillbillies in the early '80s, *The Dukes of Hazzard* combines down-home humor with mission-based fun, arena-style races, fried chicken, moonshine, and Uncle Jesse. //

DATA
DEV: **Ratbag** PUB: **Ubisoft** REL: **October**

IndyCar Series 2005

In the great race between cars and guns on Xbox, *IndyCar Series* and *NASCAR Thunder* (see next game) are doing their part to ensure that racing games outnumber first-person shooters. So far, it's close. For what it's worth, *IndyCar* will be the only racer with the official Indy Racing League license. Bullet around at speeds of up to 235 mph with up to 11 other Xbox Live players and marvel at the game's dynamic A.I. //

DATA
DEV: **Codemasters** PUB: **Codemasters** REL: **Summer**

NASCAR Thunder 2005

NASCAR Thunder's new approach makes a lot of sense for initiates who don't normally follow the spectacle. You begin as a rookie with ambitions of leaving your small town and marrying the homecoming queen. From the streets, to the amateur Craftsman Truck arenas, and finally to the big-time professional races, *Thunder 2005* features all the interpersonal drama and squabbles of the real deal, sans the fatalities. //

DATA
DEV: **Electronic Arts** PUB: **Electronic Arts** REL: **Fall**

Psychonauts Forever!

We had our suspicions when Doublefine's innovative action-platformer *Psychonauts* simply slipped off the map earlier this year, but when Microsoft confirmed that they were dropping the game from its first-party line-up, a million angels wept. Good news, however, as we've recently learned that Doublefine is close to signing a publishing deal with an interested party.

Halo 2 demo?

Call us delusional if you'd like, but we're convinced Microsoft will hand out a *Halo 2* demo to the press come E3. Ok, so we're delusional.

Tekken 5 Xbox bound?

Namco's once-popular fighting franchise Tekken, now in its fifth iteration, has been rumored to go the way of *Soul Calibur 2*—i.e., see the light of day on Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube simultaneously. When contacted for comment on the rumor, Namco neither denied nor confirmed it, instead saying the company is currently considering all options.

Rocky Legends

Once more it is time to eat lightning and crap thunder with Rocky "The Italian Stallion" Balboa, Apollo "The Master of Disaster" Creed, Tommy Gunn, and other muscled pugilists from the six *Rocky* films. *Legends*, a prequel of sorts to the very fine boxing game *Rocky*, lets players take the game's brawlers from humble beginnings to the world title, and best of all, the game will feature online pummeling via Xbox Live. //

DATA
DEV: **Venom Games** PUB: **Ubisoft** REL: **Fall**

Sahara

As Hollywood deities Penelope Cruz and Matthew McConaughey team up later this year on *Sahara*, a dry and dusty action romance based on a best-selling Clive Cussler novel of the same name, gaming is right there to make sure you relive the moments with controller in hand. Massive production budgets and next-generation graphics give *Sahara* plenty of potential. Could this be the next *Riddick* on Xbox? //

DATA
DEV: **TKO Software** PUB: **TBA** REL: **Fall**

Spider-Man 2

With great box office receipts come great sequels and the inevitable videogame tie-ins. *Spider-Man 2* brings Peter Parker up against the eight-armed menace Dr. Octopus in an adventure that borrows elements from *GTA3*. Spidey can travel on foot or take to the skies on weblines, and the game will have an all-new series of fighting moves that enable Spider-Man to better integrate his punches, leaps, and web attacks. //

DATA
DEV: **Treyarch** PUB: **Activision** REL: **May**

Spyro: A Hero's Tail

He ain't Puff the Magic Dragon, and he don't hang around with no Jackie Paper. Nor is he some sort of panzer dragon with the ability to down airships in a blaze of glory. He's Spyro, and he's sold, believe it or not, more than 13 million units worldwide. His latest adventure on Xbox features real-time environment morphing, a cast of playable critters, and—yes!—all-new Spyro gadgets for a wide variety of gameplay. //

DATA
DEV: **Eurocom** PUB: **Vivendi** REL: **Winter**

The Sims 2004

Sayonara, suburbs. *The Sims 2004* rockets Maxis' little computer people from their Pleasant Valley Sunday existence into the bustle of city life. With the change in scenery comes new professions, more social interactions, and random, but always beloved, street performers. Lifelike facial expressions and plenty of urinary incontinence in all-new locations, such as a nightclub and a subway, round off the package. //

DATA
DEV: **Maxis** PUB: **Electronic Arts** REL: **Fall**

Van Helsing

As monster-killer Van Helsing in this movie tie-in, players will do battle with Dracula and his minions. A heavy-handed nod to the hit PlayStation 2 series *Devil May Cry*, *Van Helsing* combines hack-and-slash immediacy with deadpan adventure-genre conventions. The protagonist—who looks remarkably like actor Hugh Jackman—will even be rewarded if he completes a level with his hat on. //

DATA
DEV: **Saffire Corporation** PUB: **Vivendi** REL: **May**

MONTHLY UPDATE

HALO 2

The wait goes from agonizing, to excruciating

Bungie aren't so much game developers as they are grandmasters at the ancient art of The Big Tease. The *Halo* community recently exploded with activity around the official redesign of Bungie.net, now with even more blogs and morsels about the secret working lives of Bungie employees. Oh, and also *Halo 2*.

As well, in typical Bungie fashion, the world has now one more *Halo 2* multiplayer screenshot with which to drool, discuss, and speculate. Wow, people—only five or six more months of this torture! Here's what's currently cookin' over at *Halo* HQ:

- Bungie has confirmed that *Halo 2*'s single-player campaign will take place on both Earth and —get this—a second Halo Ring.
- There's a new multiplayer mode called Assault that has teams running bombs into each others' bases, and vice versa.
- Covenant Elites will now be playable in multiplayer games. Woot!
- Ghost and Banshee vehicles will have a built-in "turbo" for that extra boost of speed.
- Bungie.net now supports Xbox Live gamertags. It involves selling a piece (albeit only a small slice) of your soul to Microsoft, but it only hurts once.

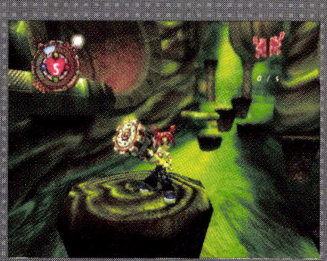
Next month: Our hands-on *Halo 2* impressions fresh from E3. //

DATA
DEV: **Bungie** PUB: **Microsoft** REL: **Fall**

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

MALICE?

It started off as such fantastic punnery—a platformer featuring a malice (read: hammer)-wielding spiky-haired extremist who runs amok in a beautiful virtual world—but it nearly ended in cancellation.



The story of *Malice* begins with the unveiling of the Xbox back in July 2000. At the time, the world was suitably impressed. *Malice*'s graphics engine technology was the real star, and the game remained anticipated for a time.

Then, nothing—for years. Once in a while, the game would surface for a preview somewhere. It would be years before *Xbox Nation* got hands-on with a rather unstable build of the game. Sure, it wasn't final code, but it's been three years and *Malice* still plays like...this?! After Vivendi dropped *Malice* from its lineup, we expected the worst. Recently, publisher Mud Duck announced that Malice has been given a 1up chance to finally publish the game here in the U.S. We eagerly await the results. //

DATA
DEV: **Argonaut** PUB: **Mud Duck** REL: **Fall**

Playlist WHAT'S COMING TO XBOX...AND WHEN

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
100 Bullets	Acclaim	October	No
25 to Life	Eidos	Spring 2005	TBA
Advent Rising	Majesco	September	TBA
Area 51	Midway	September	Yes
B.C.	Microsoft	Winter	No
Backyard Wrestling 2	Eidos	October	TBA
Brothers in Arms	Ubisoft	Fall	Yes
Bard's Tale	Acclaim	October	No
Blinx 2	Microsoft	Fall	Yes
BloodRayne 2	Majesco	October	No
Burnout 3	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	Fall	TBA
Catwoman	Electronic Arts	July	No
Close Combat: First to Fight	Take-Two	Winter	TBA
Close Combat: Red Phoenix	Take-Two	Spring 2005	Yes
Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Acclaim	June	No
Conflict: Vietnam	Gathering	Fall	No
Conker: Live and Uncut	Microsoft	Fall	Yes
Crash: Twinsanity	Vivendi	Fall	No
Darkwatch	Sammy	December	Yes
Dead or Alive Code: Chronus	Tecmo	TBA	TBA
Dead or Alive Ultimate	Tecmo	Fall	Yes
Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay	Namco	Fall	TBA
Def Jam Vendetta 2	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Deus Ex: Clan Wars	Eidos	Winter	Yes
Doom 3	Activision	Fall	Yes
DRIV3R	Atari	June	No
Dukes of Hazzard: Return of General Lee	Ubisoft	October	No
ESPN NBA 2005	Sega	Fall	Yes
ESPN NFL 2005	Sega	Fall	Yes
ESPN NHL 2005	Sega	Fall	Yes
Fable	MS	Fall	TBA
Far Cry: Instincts	Ubisoft	Winter	Yes
FIFA Soccer 2005	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Fight Club	Vivendi	Winter	TBA
FlatOut	Empire Interactive	Fall	Yes
Forza	Microsoft	Winter	Yes
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	June	Yes
Galleon	SCi	TBA	No
Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	Fall	Yes
GoldenEye 2	Electronic Arts	TBA	TBA
Guilty Gear #XX Reload	Sammy	Fall	Yes
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	TBA	TBA
Halo 2	Microsoft	September	Yes
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts	Winter	No
Headhunter: Redemption	Sega	Fall	No
Iron Phoenix	Sammy	Fall	Yes
Jade Empire	Microsoft	Winter	No
Juiced	Acclaim	Fall	Yes
Kameo: Elements of Power	MS	September	Yes
Knights of the Old Republic 2	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
Legends of Wrestling: Showdown	Acclaim	June	No
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Vivendi	TBA	No

GAME	PUBLISHER	RELEASE	LIVE
Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Malice	Bethesda	Fall	No
Marvel vs. EA	Electronic Arts	2005	TBA
MechAssault 2	MS	Winter	Yes
Men of Valor: Vietnam	Vivendi	Winter	Yes
Mercenaries	LucasArts	TBA	TBA
Metal Slug 3	SNK	Fall	No
Midway	SCi	TBA	Yes
Mortal Kombat: Deception	Midway	Fall	Yes
NARC	Midway	August	No
NASCAR Thunder 2005	Electronic Arts	Fall	No
NBA Live 2005	Electronic Arts	Fall	No
NCAA Football 2005	Electronic Arts	July	No
NHL Hockey 2005	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Fall	Yes
Painkiller	DreamCatcher	Fall	Yes
Pariah	Groove Games	Winter	Yes
Perfect Dark Zero	Microsoft	2006	Yes
Plague of Darkness	Namco	Fall	No
Prince of Persia 2	Ubisoft	TBA	TBA
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	June	No
Psychonauts	Microsoft	Winter	No
Rainbow Six: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	August	Yes
Red Ninja: End of Honor	Vivendi	Fall	No
Rocky Legends	Ubisoft	Fall	Yes
Sahara	TBA	Winter	No
Scaler	TDK	Winter	No
Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Atari	June	Yes
ShellShock: Nam '67	Eidos	TBA	No
Shrek 2	Activision	Summer	No
Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami	Fall	No
SNK vs. Capcom: SVC Chaos	SNK	November	Yes
Spider-Man 2	Activision	June	No
Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Vivendi	Winter	No
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	Fall	Yes
StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard	Fall	No
State of Emergency 2	Bam	Winter	TBA
Street Racing Syndicate	Namco	Fall	No
Sudeki	Microsoft	Summer	No
Terminator 3: Redemption	Atari	Summer	No
The Chronicles of Riddick	Vivendi	June	Yes
The Fast and the Furious	Vivendi	Winter	No
The Punisher	THQ	Fall	No
The Red Star	Acclaim	October	No
The Shield	Sammy	Winter	No
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Fall	TBA
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Summer	No
Tron 2.0: Killer App	Buena Vista Games	TBA	Yes
True Fantasy Live Online	Microsoft	Winter	Yes
Unreal Championship 2	Microsoft	Fall	Yes
Van Helsing	Vivendi	May	No
X-Men Legends	Activision	Fall	No

XRATED

SMART REVIEWS JUNE 2004

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DIESEL POWERED

In a month characterized by some truly mediocre fare, *Riddick* shines

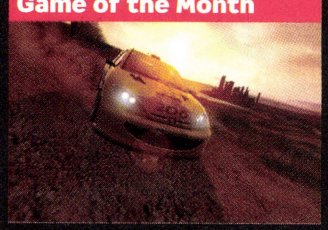
Beware the dregs of May. You want a videogame version of the board game *Trivial Pursuit*, one generous enough to pay the talentless comedian Whoopi Goldberg to pose questions to players? You're hungry to play the trading card game *Yu-Gi-Oh!* on Xbox, but only if it doesn't come with online play? Got a hankering for a lackluster PC port? With the depressing certainty of death, taxes, and *American Idol*, all the B-grade game titles appear in spring, only to be unceremoniously shoveled into the bargain bin three weeks later.

But even in these dark days, there are hits to be had. Racing games *RalliSport Challenge 2* and *TOCA Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator* both uphold fine traditions and enthrall with their extensive Live modes, and *Pure Pinball* manages to provide many thrills for very few dollars. The big surprise is the Vin Diesel-fueled *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*. It's easily the best-looking Xbox game to date, delivering *Doom 3* graphics ahead of schedule, and is one of the greatest games on the system, period. The exclusive review starts on page 82.

This issue also marks the debut for import game reviews, with Japan's restaurant-themed dating sim *Bistro Cupid*. In the coming months, look for more from both Europe and Japan or suffer the consequences.

JUNE XRATED AWARDS

Game of the Month



RalliSport Challenge 2
Microsoft

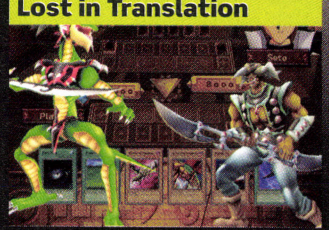
It was a close call between *Riddick* and *RalliSport* this month, but in the end, offroad cars won over futuristic guns, thanks largely to *Challenge*'s well-constructed Live mode.

Kill Bill (and Ted) Award

Hitman: Contracts
Eidos Interactive

Heck, kill Bill, Ted, Fred, Joe, Jack, Percy, Lance, Mitch, Herman, Hal, Eddie, Mervis, Thor, Bucky, Yuma, Pete, Wilbur, Herotodus, and Chucky. They had it coming...

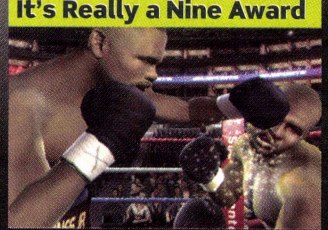
Lost in Translation



Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Dawn of Destiny (Konami)

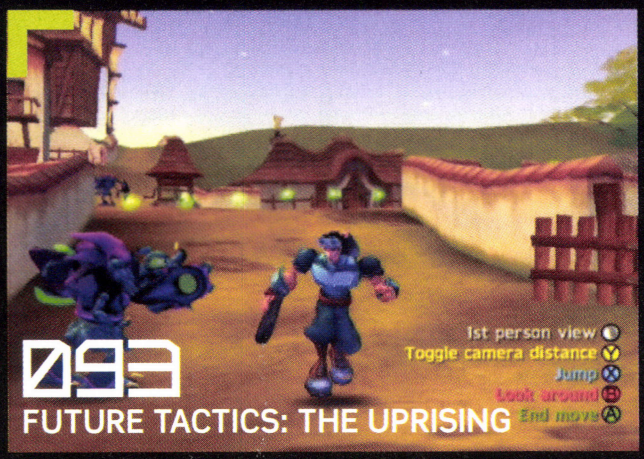
Try *The Yawn of Destiny. Yu-Gi-Oh!* comes to Xbox in the form of a slow-paced, poorly constructed translation of the popular card game. Without online play.

It's Really a Nine Award



Fight Night 2004
EA Sports

Xbox Nation erroneously gave *Fight Night 2004* an 8/10 last issue, rather than the 9/10 that it rightfully deserved. The editors regret the misprint; commence punching.



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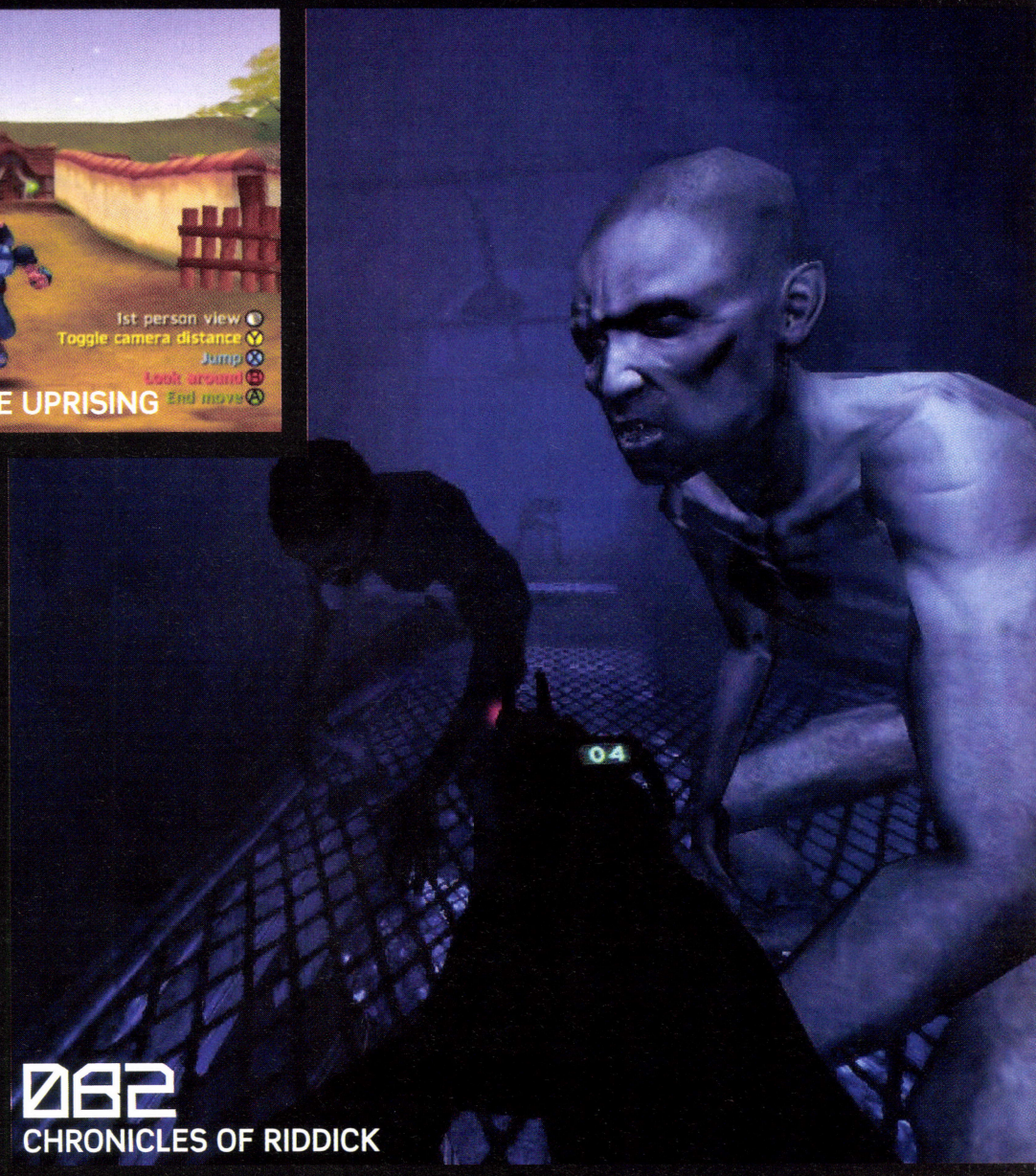
MAFIA



082
CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

LAST MONTH'S HIT OR MISS

HIT

Ninja Gaiden
Tecmo

It turns out Tecmo's gorgeous adventure *Ninja Gaiden* was worth the wait. From last issue's review: "If *Gaiden* isn't the 'perfect' action game, it's pretty damn close."

MISS

All-Star Baseball 2005
Acclaim

Not-so-fun fact: *All-Star Baseball 2005*'s disorienting, jarring, and gameplay-hampering FielderCam won *Xbox Nation*'s "Worst Person Mode" award.

MAKING THE GRADE

The score's the thing...

Celebrate greatness. Flush video feces. This is the mandate *Xbox Nation* game reviewers are given and the philosophy its critics operate under. *XBN* strives to be harsh but fair in its scoring; with games costing upwards of $50, no one benefits from reviews with padded scores, least of all you.

Breaking down review grades, you'll find a game with a score of one is Satan's bedchild. Two indicates raw sewage. Three is embarrassing. Four is flawed. Five equals average. Six is all right. Seven is good, eight great. Nine is excellent, and 10 out of 10 is truly great, and as near to a perfect experience as it's possible to get.

XBOX LIVE

Look for this handy-dandy box describing a game's Xbox Live content. As always, Xbox Live content will be factored in to achieve a holistic final grade.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

PUBLISHER: **Vivendi Universal** // DEVELOPER: **Starbreeze Studios** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **M**

The best Vin Diesel movie you've never seen

This summer, legions of Vin Diesel haters will be faced with the unsavory task of eating their own skepticism and bile while playing *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*.

As part of an overall sci-fi trilogy to be completed this summer with *Riddick*'s theatrical release, *Bay* the videogame serves as a prequel to Diesel's sleeper action vehicle *Pitch Black*, giving fans an exclusive look at antihero Richard B. Riddick's sordid past.

The game lays to rest, once and for all, the old adage that movie-licensed games must suck. *Bay* doesn't suck—not even a little. In fact, this first-person shooter is unofficially the new poster boy for a smarter and infinitely more compelling convergence between Hollywood and videogames. Graphically exquisite and resplendently crafted, *Bay* is one of the best exclusive titles in the Xbox library. And guess what? Nobody saw it coming.

BUTCHER BAY IS ONE OF THE BEST EXCLUSIVES IN THE XBOX LIBRARY.

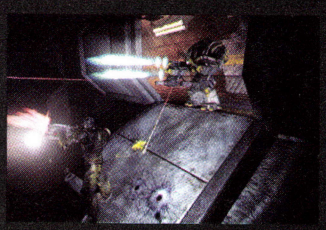
But what the hell? Given that even the most ardent Vin Diesel fans see right through the banalities of his action antics onscreen, how is it even possible Diesel could churn out something deserving of such praise?

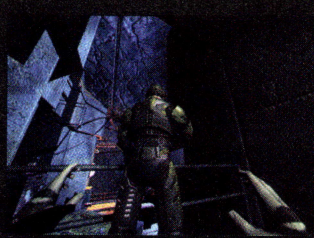
Well, for starters, Diesel didn't have much of a hand in creating *Bay*. Developed by Starbreeze Studios out of Sweden, the game stars a remarkably lifelike Diesel reprising his role as Riddick, a bald badass who is given for bounty at Butcher Bay, a maximum-security slammer on a barren desert planet. This simple premise gives rise to remarkable elements within the game's narrative framework, all of which undoubtedly owe much to conscientious game design.

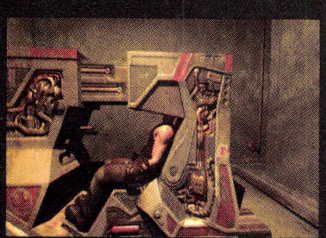
Immediately noticeable is the amazing likeness of Diesel's in-game character to his real-life visage; combine the striking visuals with his signature deadpan voice work, ace motion-captured animation, and a decent script worthy of action cinema, and it's easy to see how *Bay* exposes even Electronic Arts' acclaimed *Lord of the Rings* series as a mere evolutionary step in the movie-gaming confluence. As you stalk the denizens of Butcher Bay, there is an undeniable sense that you are Riddick, as played by Diesel.

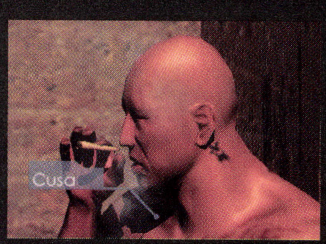
Also well tempered is the pace at

Crack this armored shell to get to the chocolatey goodness within.









THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

When you're climbing ledges and scaling heights, the game's camera pulls back into third-person perspective.

which the narrative unfolds in the game. Those with an aversion to prison movies (and, by extension, games set in jail) will be glad to learn that *Bay* delivers an excellent balance of inmate interaction in the form of errands and missions and environmental exploration. Thankfully, you're never stuck for very long doing fetch quests for other convicts, nor are you left wandering levels without a clue of what your immediate destination should be.

Events propel you through the game with a rapid urgency, so that even if you've never seen either of the *Riddick* movies, you're summarily sucked in to the adventure at hand. But what makes the *Bay* experience work takes much more than a string of convincing cut-scenes and endless ambience. As a first-person shooter, the game also re(de)fines the rules of its genre, destroying the unspoken edict that such games can't also have good platforming and melee combat.

Since your goal for most of the game is to escape from prison (and possibly exact a pinch of revenge for good measure), expect a decent amount of jumping, climbing, crawling, hanging, and shimmying around Butcher Bay. While platforming in a first-person game usually signals the unraveling of immersion and sows seeds of frustration, *Bay* is a choice exception to the stereotype.

When it's necessary for Riddick to perform these maneuvers, the camera snaps to a cinematic third-person perspective, conveying both scale and motion in one fell swoop. And rather than bob you about as a disembodied forearm and trigger finger like most FPS titles, *Bay* gives your character actual shape and mass. As if taking an invisible cue from *Breakdown*, Namco's innovative but mechanically flawed first-person adventure, *Bay*'s use of total immersion allows you to make out your own elongated shadow in a dimly lit hallway or look down and see your own arms and legs swing and move as you walk or run. Although it's mostly visual in nature, having a sense of your physical boundaries in this first-person game contributes a great deal to *Bay*'s hand-to-hand combat system.

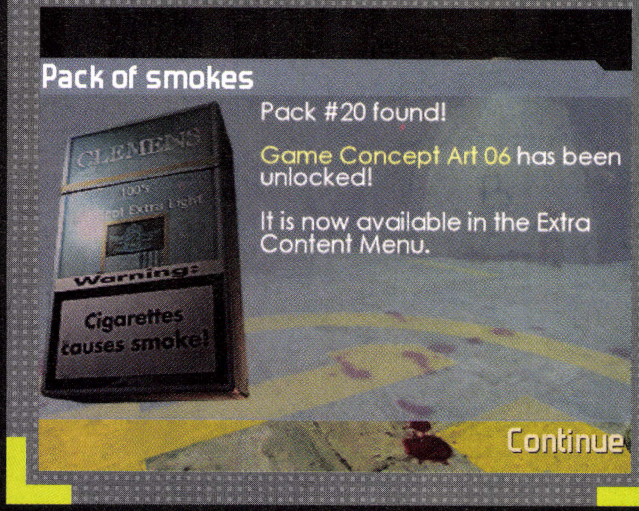
Similar to the alpha male in *Breakdown*, Riddick's melee prowess is one of his most powerful weapons in the game. Although the punching gameplay is straightforward and simple (left hook, right hook, uppercut!), there's a surprising amount of depth to be had when you're killing with your bare hands. While blocking, the game gives you a small window of opportunity to perform fatal reversals on your enemies, be it with your fists, a shiv, or a steel pipe. You can even grapple a warden's gun before he pulls the trigger and force him to—yes—blow his own head off.

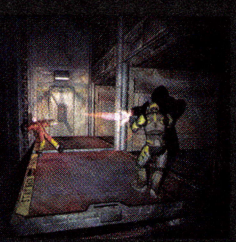
Ingenious touches, such as hidden (except when you're taking damage) life bars and the lack of an onscreen stealth meter (the screen tints blue when you're obscured from A.I.), also help make the game engrossing and

UP IN SMOKE

Cigarettes as unlockable bonus content

The surgeon general does not approve of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay*. As a gritty adventure set within the walls of the toughest prison in the galaxy, *Bay* features a variety of collectible cigarette packs. No, Mr. Riddick doesn't smoke in the game. Collecting these cigarettes, each complete with clever logos, opens up unlockable content such as concept art and prototype movies of the game as *Pitch Black* in 2002. Darkly humorous and morally ambiguous, *Bay* is, alas, not a game for little Jimmy.





What would a prison game be without some gratuitous beatdowns?

tense. In fact, it wouldn't be off the mark to say *Bay*'s near-flawless controls and unhealthy variety of brutal assassinations, combined with the game's in-your-face perspective, make this the first (and perhaps only) great FPS-stealth hybrid on consoles.

What keeps *Bay* from total godliness are the occasional rough edges, whether it's the strange inhuman flailing of a rag-doll corpse or the awkward, mismatched lip synch during cut-scenes, that a title like *Halo* would never exhibit. While these may be minor knocks on an overall excellent package, some may have a bigger problem with the game's length. As a testament to *Bay*'s appeal, first-time players will likely finish the game in less than 10 hours—a weekend's binge. For a game this irresistible, the ride is over all too soon. Playing through *Bay* again on the hardest difficulty level proves rewarding and will unlock bonus content (see sidebar) missed the first time around.

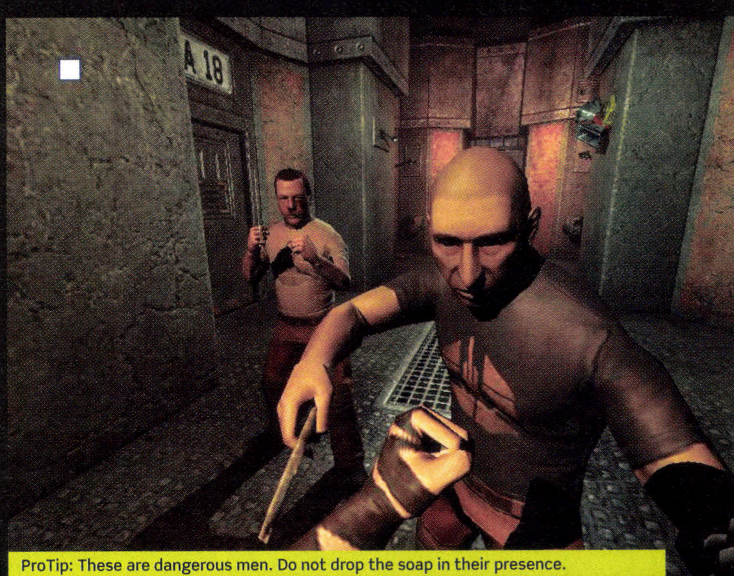
At the end of the bloody sci-noir journey, however, what will undoubtedly be the talk of Xbox town is *Bay*'s unbelievable graphics,

delivering here and now technology gamers have been promised in unreleased games such as *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*.

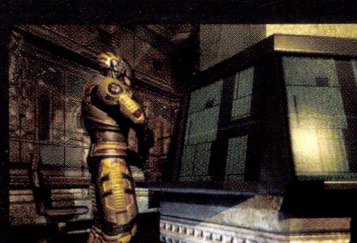
As is readily apparent from the gorgeous screenshots, *Bay*'s extensive use of normal-mapped textures and per-pixel shading gives everything an astonishing amount of relief and detail. Visually, it's the stuff of tech demos and pipe dreams, and if the current generation of Xbox titles should peak technologically with this game, all would still be hunky-dory with this world. //

Che Chou

XBN 09
OUT OF TEN



ProTip: These are dangerous men. Do not drop the soap in their presence.



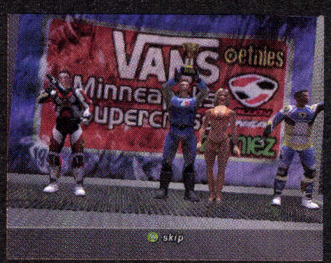
MTX: MOTOTRAX

PUBLISHER: **Activision** // DEVELOPER: **Left Field Productions** // PLAYERS: **1-2** // LIVE: **Yes** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **E**

Activision's two-wheeled speedfest satisfies

With *MTX: Mototrax*, Activision and Left Field are going up against the stiff competition of *MX Unleashed* from THQ and Rainbow Studios. But Left Field has done well for itself; *Mototrax* is a serious contender.

The game features two main areas, racing, and stunt tracks (you can do stunts during a race, but only to earn bragging rights). The single-player game offers MTX career or exhibition modes, with 16 tracks each for both supercross and motocross and eight different stunt venues. The graphics are certainly passable, but you're not likely to care—the visual simplicity here allows for an astounding sense of speed.



Mototrax runs at a blazing 60fps and rarely, if ever, stutters. The controls are dead on, and include a clutch for popping the engine out of a turn and the ability to preload the suspension for serious air. The tracks quickly evolve into nasty combinations of turns and jumps, and by the time you hit the 250cc circuit, one bad jump can cost you the race.

The stunt system is broad if not very deep, offering aerial tricks and flips. There are a lot of stunts, and they can be strung together, but despite this, the variety simply isn't there. To be fair, this is true of real-life motocross tricks, given there's only so many ways to move a heavy motorcycle. Also, the career mode is a bit thin, since your only reward (besides the standard bike upgrades) is a longer list of unlockable sponsor logos.

However, when you're on the track, these minor disappointments don't matter one jot. *Mototrax* offers an almost visceral appeal—you can really feel the bike moving under you. If, like grizzled rocker Sammy Hagar, you are physically unable to drive 55, or if speed has become your new personal savior, Mototrax threatens to satisfy in spades. //

Jeff Lundrigan

XBN 07
OUT OF TEN

XBOX LIVE

MTX Mototrax allows you to compete with eight other players in either a racing series or a freestyle tricks battle. There's also an interesting King of the Hill contest, in which you attempt to grab a gold helmet by running into other players, with the one holding it the longest winning.

The first to make it across the Void of Despair wins a free sundae with nuts.

MAFIA

PUBLISHER: **Gathering** // DEVELOPER: **Illusion** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **M**

A family of your own. To disown.

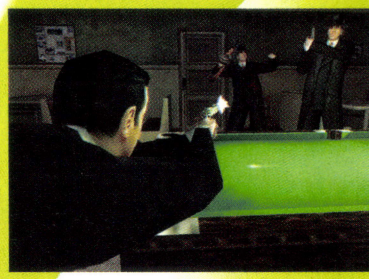
Here's an offer Xbox owners can certainly refuse: a poorly done port of the well-done PC shooter *Mafia*. *Mafia*'s PC iteration was outstanding in terms of graphics and overall presentation, like the wedding of Vito Corleone's daughter. The Xbox version, conversely, is more like having to sit and listen to Henry Hill's annoying laugh through a smoky, four-hour-long poker game.

The environmental graphics appear very flat and blurred, and the texturing looks as if it belongs on the PlayStation 2. Considering PC ports to Xbox were supposed to be as simple as doing a "save as," this title seems to go out of its way to look excessively ugly, with the character animations and models being the only exception. From a design perspective, driving through the city in whatever car you want to take waxes of the *Grand Theft Auto* series, but, considering the vehicles available at the time, its execution ends up feeling more like *Grand Theft Amish*. It's very slow, hard to control, and needlessly annoying.

The game has also been sanitized, as there is a complete absence of blood in the third-person-perspective gun battles, blood that flowed like *el vino rojo* in the PC version. Worse still, the aiming system used for shootouts is video agony. The auto aiming feature is distracting, unnecessary, and reeks of a last-minute addition to compensate for a lazy transition from PC to Xbox.

In eulogizing *Mafia*, it's important to note the game is not terrible. It's just another example of blown potential. Still, if the PC version could give an order, it should have this version whacked for infringing on its turf. //
Russell Garbutt

The Goodfellas parade ended horribly.



XBN 04 OUT OF TEN

YU-GI-OH!: THE DAWN OF DESTINY

PUBLISHER: **Konami** // DEVELOPER: **KCE Japan** // PLAYERS: **1-2** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$39.99** // ESRB: **E**

A card game in need of a new hand...

No matter which side of the geek wars you're on—be it card-collecting nerd or dedicated antidweeb fighter—*Yu-Gi-Oh!: The Dawn of Destiny* is simply no fun. It's a video paper cut, and the nastiest one of your life.

Unlike *Yu-Gi-Oh*'s previous incarnations on PlayStation 2 and GameCube, *Destiny* is strictly a no-frills package. There's no story mode, no wacky new rules, and nothing that *Yu-Gi-Oh!: Forbidden Memories* didn't do way back on PlayStation. Forty dollars buys nothing but a video version of the standard real-life *Yu-Gi-Oh!* trading-card game. The only real variation here is a triple-duel mode that involves challenging three CPU opponents in a row to battle—shock and awe. And forget about Xbox Live support, even though it's a no-brainer for a game like this—the only way to duel a friend is via a local network, as if the typical *Yu-Gi-Oh!* duelist has two Xboxes and a home LAN in his bedroom.

Even with the dueling itself, problems make themselves prevalent in the interface. There's no way to save or end a game in progress, and the overly complicated control scheme makes navigating the board more of a pain than really necessary. The 3D-rendered creatures look nice, yes, but for real duelists, *Destiny* is a poor use of money that could've gone toward the purchase of more *Yu-Gi-Oh!* cards. //
Kevin Gifford

Popular anime? Meet boring card game.

XBN 04 OUT OF TEN

TRIVIAL PURSUIT: UNHINGED

PUBLISHER: **Atari** // DEVELOPER: **Artech Studios** // PLAYERS: **1-6** // LIVE: **Yes** // MSRP: **$29.99** // ESRB: **T**

None more trivial...

With wide appeal and a low barrier to entry, the video board game *Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged* falls victim to the "good enough" syndrome; little effort was made to spiff up the videogame version for savvy gamers.

Graphically horrific, *Unhinged* also suffers from a bad camera, so it's hard to see which wedges you still need and which direction they lie in. When video clips are used, they're of poor quality. Celebrities read the questions, but having, say, Whoopi Goldberg pose a multiple-choice question about Warren G. Harding adds nothing to the experience. Developer Artech failed to create a compelling single-player experience here; there is no A.I. to play against and there are no stats tracked. Worst of all, there are a great many repeated questions.

There are several ways to play, including no-frills classic mode and a flash mode for when you can't spare the time for a full-on game. But the star here, of course, is the unhinged mode, which twists the experience a tad. Players can place bets on whether others will get questions correct and then use accumulated points to spend on special moves, including stealing an opponent's wedge. Betting also relieves a bit of the downtime tedium, giving you something to do while you wait for your turn. Unhinged mode also features special board spaces to spice up play, such as a hidden sticky space that prevents movement until a question is answered correctly.

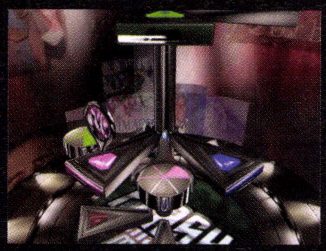
Unhinged, especially with online play, does the job, but A) lacks polish, B) underwhelms, C) pales in comparison to the board game that inspired it, or D) all of the above.

"D" gets the wedge. //
Carrie Shepherd

XBOX LIVE

Considering the fact that *Trivial Pursuit: Unhinged* has no single-player game to speak of, its Xbox Live experience saves it from worthlessness if you don't have a cadre of friends willing to subject themselves to a trivia face-off. Weirdly, *Unhinged* lets you join a game already in progress, even though you likely won't have a chance in hell of catching up.

Board spaces failed in their escape attempt.



XBN 03 OUT OF TEN

PURE PINBALL

PUBLISHER: **XS Games** // DEVELOPER: **Bjorn Larsson** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$19.99** // ESRB: **E**

It's a pinball wizard, with hardly any twist

Not since the rock opera *Tommy* has the manly art of pinball received its due. Its cultural significance lessened first by the advent of the videogame and then by the fall of arcades, pinball has become a footnote, a curiosity.

XS Games' *Pure Pinball* does nothing to elevate the game back to its true glory. On Xbox, pinball is certainly a curiosity, but at least here it's a brightly colored video-cotton-candy curiosity. Its cheery, perhaps a bit overworked, aural serenade hearkens back to noisy, decibel-laden arcades. Train whistles hoot, sirens wail, and every well-timed pinball whack is rewarded with cries of "Combo!", "Double combo!", or some other confirmation of the player's prowess.

The Xbox version of *Pinball* improves upon its PC counterpart by adding a fourth table, Hyper Space, but sadly, does not include the option to modify the existing terrain or create something new.

Man's need for speed is oftentimes excessive.

Twelve—count 'em—fixed and scrolling camera views allow players to customize the perspective. The close-up views provide a spectacular amount of detail, right down to the faux reflection of the player in the ball. It's possible, too, to tamper with the other game settings to remove, say, the table's glass overlay and even the room-scenery background to create an absolutely pure pinball experience in which there is naught but the table.

As for the game itself, its physics are absolutely true to life, and its tilts—a proper smiting for too much cheating—are fairly issued. The song, as ever, remains the same and tunefully played. Amen. //
Greg Orlando

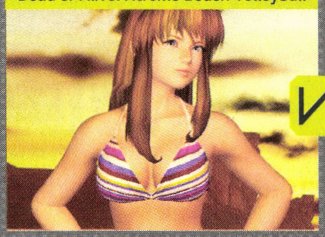
XBN 07 OUT OF TEN

VERSUS MODE

Each month, two games duel to the death

Think there's nothing out there quite like *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*? Well, you're almost right—Team Ninja's demented island dollhouse is unique from an American perspective. In Japan, they eat weirder games for breakfast, which is why *Volleyball* is pitted against another Xbox bizarrosity: *Bistro Cupid*, a bit of big-eyed-chick nonsense from way back in 2001. With the market's only cartoon chef simulator, packed to the rafters with anime fanboy appeal, how could Xbox fail to conquer Japan? **David Smith**

Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball



VS.

Bistro Cupid

	What the hell is this?	Lay the blame on:	Fashion victimization:	Audience-identification figure:	FINAL VERDICT:
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Lesbian dating sim and bikini Pokémon with bonus volleyball game.	Tomonobu Itagaki and his Team Ninja *hentai* squad.	2,624 individually modeled virtual bikinis.	Dennis Rodman's long-lost cousin.	The dating-sim duel ends with a victor in Tecmo's *Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*, but one thing is clear: Everyone loses when the fight is over Japanese women, be they beach bunnies or barmaids.
Bistro Cupid	Heterosexual dating sim and recipe Pokémon with bonus restaurant-management game.	Anonymous Hong Kong development team Firedog.	Toxic, frilly French-maid death.	Such a shut-in loser that he never appears onscreen.	
THE WINNER:	*Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. "I love lesbians...so why don't lesbians love me?"—Sloppy Seconds	*Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Itagaki is certifiably insane; *Cupid*'s creators may not even, in fact, exist.	*TIE. Volleyball* delivers the standard-issue skin; *Cupid* has the fetish appeal.	*Bistro Cupid*. Who can't identify with the socially dysfunctional guy living in mom's basement?	

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

PUBLISHER: **Codemasters** // DEVELOPER: **Codemasters** // PLAYERS: **1-12** // LIVE: **Yes** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **E**

From many motorsports, one great game

TOCA Race Driver 2 ventures bravely beyond the call of duty by becoming the first Xbox racing title to encompass the whole spectrum of motorsports, be it street, rally, vintage, exotic, stock, or Formula One. But in spite of such lofty ambitions, the game deftly handles each of its respective subgenres with authority.

The core of *Driver 2*'s single-player career unfurls through a series of championships propelled loosely by a story line of a rookie driver on the long climb upward. Strange, frightening, cadaverlike CG characters in the cut-scenes notwithstanding, the game's career mode does an outstanding job of putting you through the paces of the various racing styles.

Driver 2 builds its array of drastically dissimilar vehicles and races on an excellent gameplay foundation, combining well-tuned controls and realistic, yet intuitive physics. Whether you're grip-cornering downhill in an all-wheel-drive Nissan Skyline GTR, whipping around icy hairpins in a WRX rally monster, or wrestling with the momentum of a lumbering big-rig tractor, the game behaves consistently across the board, allowing you immediately to see the big gameplay picture and, subsequently, develop control nuances for any given situation.

The game isn't without its quirks, however. Although it features a slew of ultradeep performance-tweaking options, you can't actually access these abilities during the career mode. Furthermore, because *Driver 2*'s strength is its diversity, those turned off by any one particular style of racing may find the career mode frustratingly difficult. View this as a deeper, more disparate take on the good looks and addictive handling of *Project Gotham Racing 2*, however, and it's clear that the game is a must-buy for any discriminating racing fanatic. // **Che Chou**

Turn left to show your support for wacky ideas like Social Security for cats.

XBOX LIVE

While *TOCA Race Driver 2*'s Xbox Live support, with its lack of integrated leader boards and monthly challenges, isn't as robust as the features found in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, the game soundly supports up to 12 players online. Also implemented is a telling ranking system that fluctuates when you win, lose, or forfeit (i.e., disconnect) races. As of now, there's no word on any downloadable content. Boo! Hiss!

XBN 08 OUT OF TEN

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

PUBLISHER: **Eidos** // DEVELOPER: **IO Interactive** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **M**

Agent 47's third outing misses the target

Why are there so many games about killing people? Here's one reason: Violence is an easily understandable way to portray dramatic conflict. If a game's antagonists kill the player, he fails. If the player kills his virtual attackers, he succeeds. This concept is at the heart of countless games, from *Space Invaders* to more modern amusements such as *Hitman: Contracts*. The difference is that now, with more sophisticated technology, the violence is much less abstract. That's why the squares freak out. "You just shot that man in the head with two .45s! Now you're dragging his body into a closet!" They don't realize *Contracts*' realism merely dresses up the same simple game mechanic that has been around 20-plus years. The violence is just a metaphor. These games aren't really about killing; they're only about success or failure.

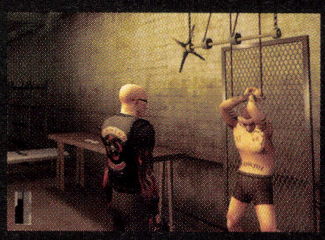
To its credit, *Contracts* elaborates quite a bit on the standard kill-or-be-killed formula. Chrome-domed assassin Agent 47 can sneak around to avoid detection, hide bodies so they won't be discovered, and disguise himself with fallen foes' clothes to move freely among his enemies. He can kill noiselessly with his fiber-wire garrote or a silenced pistol. The point of all this, of course, is to encourage a certain subtlety. It's easier to approach a target when you're in disguise, the theory goes, than to charge in with guns blazing.

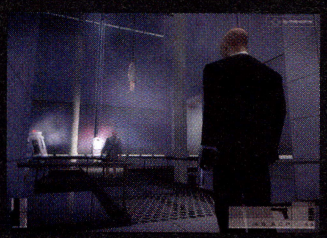
> DISGUISES WORK MOST OF THE TIME BUT NOT DEPENDABLY

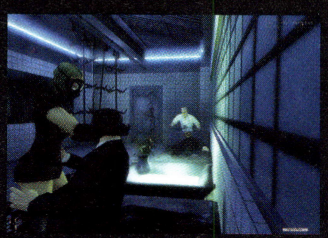
Unfortunately, it's very difficult to create a game world that reacts convincingly to such subterfuge, and *Contracts* doesn't quite pull it off. Disguises work most of the time, but not dependably. Apparently, there are complex (but undisclosed) rules defining suspicious behavior for Russian soldiers, Eastern European opium waiters, and French sanitarium patients. When 47 leaves a body behind, there's always a chance it will be discovered—and if it is, enemies will attack him immediately, even if he's far away from the body's location, and even if he's changed disguises.

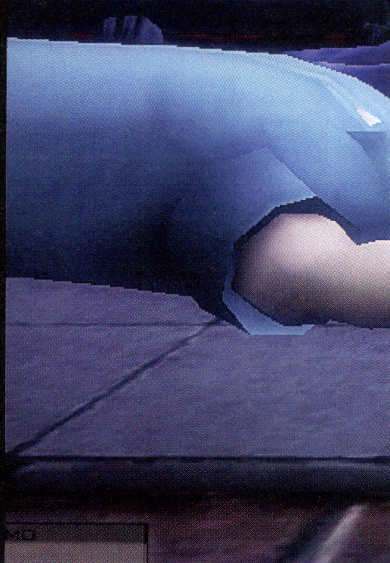
Despite these cracks in the game's veneer of verisimilitude, that old *Hitman* magic remains. Agent 47 arrives at the scene of his crimes looking sharp—and sharply ›

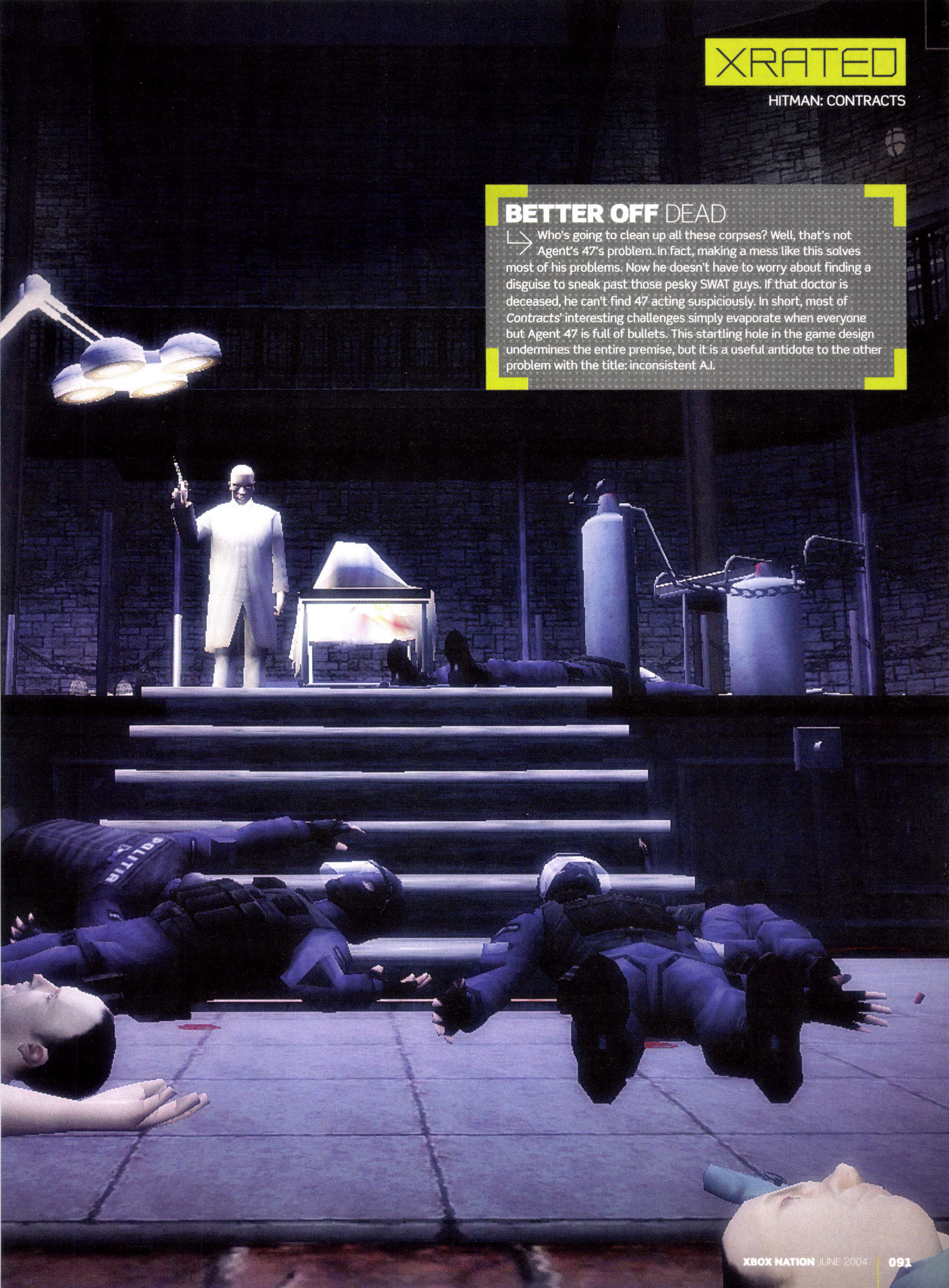
In an ironic twist, Johnny "Butcher Knife" Ragone was killed by a meat hook.







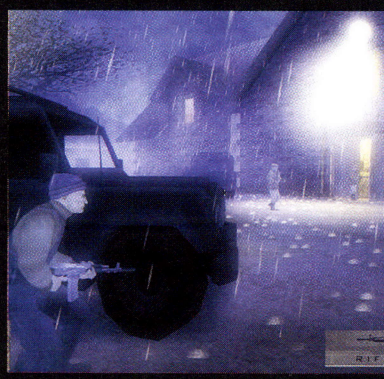




BETTER OFF DEAD

Who's going to clean up all these corpses? Well, that's not Agent's 47's problem. In fact, making a mess like this solves most of his problems. Now he doesn't have to worry about finding a disguise to sneak past those pesky SWAT guys. If that doctor is deceased, he can't find 47 acting suspiciously. In short, most of *Contracts*' interesting challenges simply evaporate when everyone but Agent 47 is full of bullets. This startling hole in the game design undermines the entire premise, but it is a useful antidote to the other problem with the title: inconsistent A.I.

While the SWAT team attempted to bring down Agent 47, the stair police worked feverishly to ensure carpet cleanliness.



› conspicuous—with his tailored suit, blood-red tie, and shiny hairless pate. He terminates the first henchman he can find, taking the clothes and hiding the body. Then he infiltrates the target's lair, changing disguises as necessary (which means a little more wet work, but hey—omelettes, eggs). Sometimes an inside contact will provide information or a confrontation-free way to eliminate the mark. Poisoning remains a time-tested favorite. If that's not an option, 47 gets as close as he can via costumes and sneakery, whacks the target, and gets the hell out of Dodge—undetected, if possible.

When it works, it's magical. The trouble is, there's no way in hell to figure out how to accomplish the mission on the first try, or the second, or even the fifth. Like a blind man who feels his way through an unfamiliar room, perceiving the furniture's layout as he bumps into it, a player's most reliable information comes from screwing up. Oh, that's not a good place to hide a body: Try somewhere else. Whoops, that type of guard isn't welcome in this building: Look for some other disguise. Uh-oh, there are too many henchmen here to escape this way: Search for another route. Eventually, with patience and persistence, the player discovers just what to do. The payoff—the perfect hit—plays out like an elegant symphony, but by then, the rehearsal's been heard a half-dozen times or more.

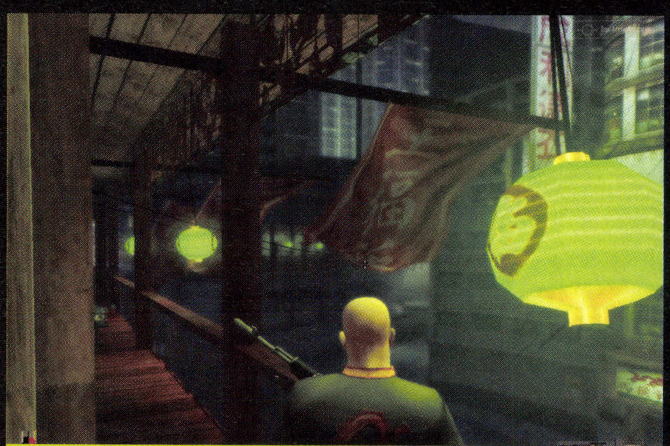
Surprisingly, on most missions, there is another way: Just kill everyone. Don't bother with disguises or hiding bodies. Let slip the dogs of war! Put bullets into everybody—some of 'em are targets, and the others can't slow 47 down if they're corpses. It's not the way *Contracts* is meant to be played—and, in fact, it does get rather boring—but it's a straightforward way to get to the next mission when dying and retrying loses its luster. Unlike in similar games such as *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear Solid*, *Contracts*' variations on the kill-or-be-killed formula aren't fully integrated into its gameplay. Its depth is only skin-deep, so to speak. This reduces the experience to that of *Space Invaders*, kill or be killed, simple success or failure.

The player has a choice. Does he coax out *Contracts*' subtlety, or does he play essentially the same game he's been playing for two decades? The first option may have him tearing his hair out—like Agent 47?—while the second is too straightforward to be interesting, even if it is appealingly attired in a new suit and tie. //

Paul V. Byrnes

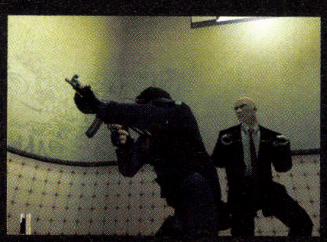
AGENT 47 NEEDS A WIG

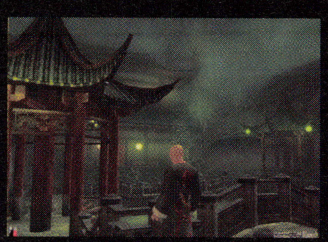
Agent 47 shows up to every assignment without so much as a hat to cover the big bald head that gives him away to anyone who spots him. Perhaps 47 identifies with other bald badasses such as the television detective Kojak and/or Marvel Comics' Kingpin or Silver Surfer. But wouldn't it be great if players could find or earn various wigs as they made their way through the game? An Afro, an Elvis-style pompadour, the obligatory rainbow wig, and a totally sick mullet are just a few delightful possibilities. In all seriousness, however, it would make a lot of sense.



Contracts may have its problems, but looks isn't one of them.

XBN 06 OUT OF TEN





FUTURE TACTICS: THE UPRISING

PUBLISHER: **Crave** // DEVELOPER: **Zed Two** // PLAYERS: **1-2** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$19.99** // ESRB: **T**

Unsafe at any price...

The tactical-strategy genre is a stodgy one, what with its hexagons, languid turn-based battles, and underlying core of arithmetic. Crave's *Future Tactics: The Uprising* bravely attempts to inject some life into the proceedings, eschewing many of the genre's antiquated rules in favor of hipper, more action-oriented gameplay. It's a noble quest, indeed, but not an entirely successful one.

First off, don't expect a weighty, complex plot full of political intrigue—*Tactics*' postapocalyptic story line values goofball humor and silly characters over any actual drama. It's not quite *Armed and Dangerous* funny, but you'll emit a few chuckles nonetheless. The lightweight narrative won't keep you enthralled, though, so it's up to the gameplay to keep you going...and odds are it won't. *Tactics* handles the core elements of movement and combat in a wildly different manner than most strategy games. Here, you move your characters freely within a certain radius and attack using line-of-sight gunfire. Sure, it ups the action quotient, but consequently, battles turn into annoying guessing games. *Will I be able to see that enemy? Can he see me? How far can he move?* These aren't fun questions to ask, and you'll be asking them constantly.

Subpar visuals don't help matters, either. Sadly, simplistic landscapes, tacky colors, dorky characters, and an utter lack of polish justify the bargain-bin pricing. The poor graphics even leech the thrill of deformable terrain—the sparse animation of knocking boulders over or blasting objects looks sadly unrealistic. Even for $20, this one lacks punch. //

Shane Bettenhausen

XBN 04 OUT OF TEN

BISTRO CUPID

IMPORT REVIEW

PUBLISHER: **Success** // DEVELOPER: **Firedog** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No**

Shot through the heart? Blame the Bistro Cupid.

Exactly how *Bistro Cupid* was thought up may never be known. It's possible the developers were out in some Tokyo restaurant, whereupon they spied the most beautiful troop of waitresses. Later, beclouded by the effects of dangerous blood-sake levels, they put two and two together—restaurants and lovely girls—and came up with five: a romantic cooking game. Tasty!

In *Cupid*'s mad, mad world, players must ply their silver service at restaurants across Japan. Do a sterling job and promotions beckon. Maybe, just maybe, the manager will be sufficiently enamored of his star waitress to make her the object of his romantic interest. Player stats and restaurant turnover increase in correlation with the standard of performance. However, performance is simply a matter of patience. And skill is of no benefit: Success is awarded to all those who sit through the endless cut-scenes and idle moments marring this intriguing release.

While *Cupid* presents what is undoubtedly an inspired concept (dubiously inspired, no doubt, but inspired nonetheless), it fails to include any challenging gameplay. It's unique, sure—but then there's a very good reason for that. //

Jonti Davies

"Yes, I think I do want fries with that."

XBN 05 OUT OF TEN

GAME OF THE MONTH XBN JUNE 2004

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

PUBLISHER: **Microsoft** // DEVELOPER: **DICE** // PLAYERS: **1-4** // LIVE: **Yes** // MSRP: **$49.99** // ESRB: **E**

A most worthy challenge indeed

If the only surviving remnants of humanity's once great civilization were to be a battered yet functional Xbox and a copy of *RalliSport Challenge 2*, extraterrestrial visitors could still gather all the vital information they'd need about man, his environment, and his follies.

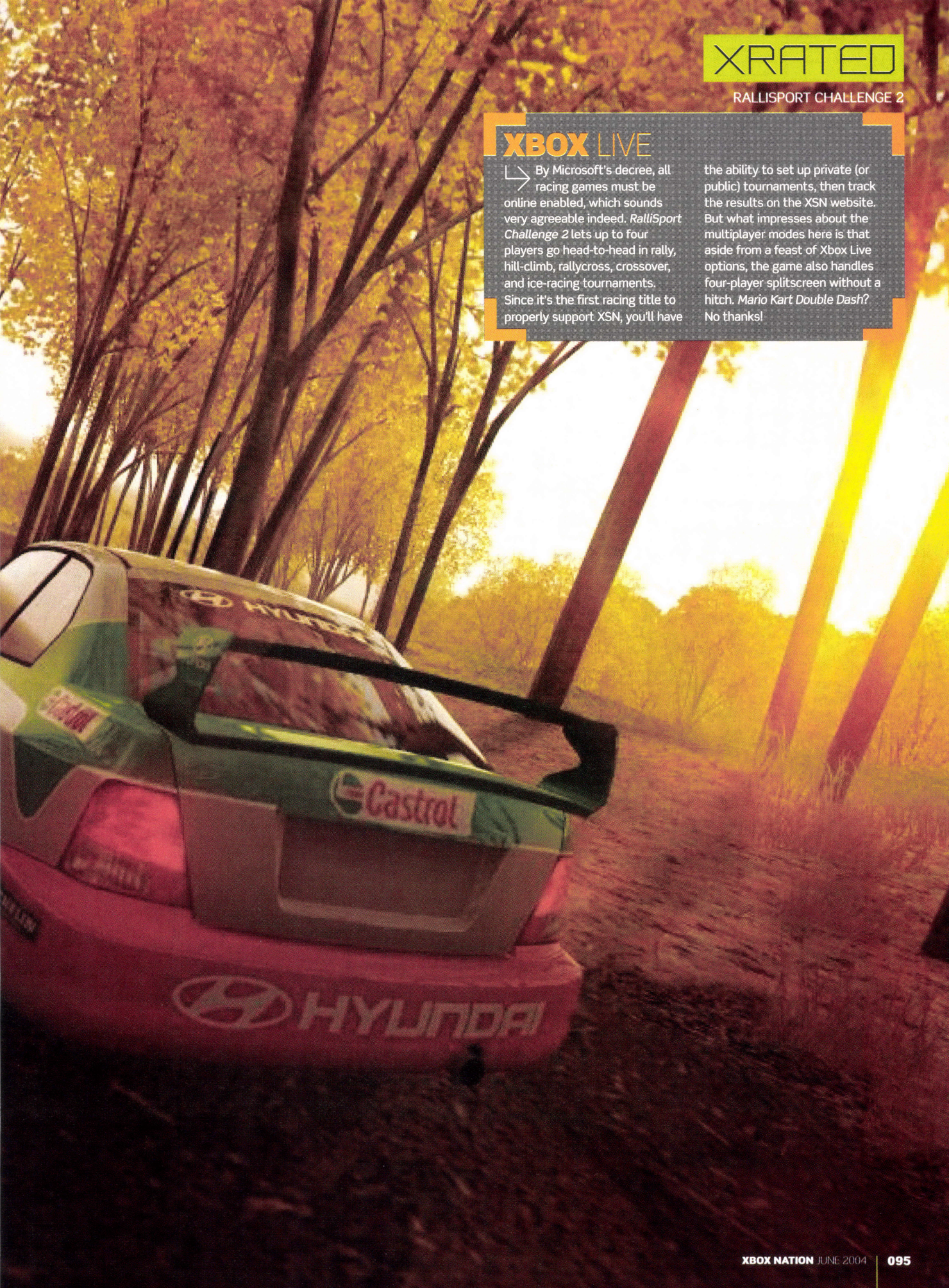
These alien scientists could learn through the game's near photo-realism, for example, that not only was the Earth once green, but that with the changing of the seasons and weather came golden leaves, gray skies, and torrential showers. And as these otherworldly observers watched the hapless thrashing of rally cars by the backhand of physics and gravity in the game, they'd no doubt get the sense that humans were determined little buggers, driven solely by their passion to overcome nature's obstacles.

In the here and now, however, *Challenge 2* is much more than a time capsule of life on Earth—the game is, on every level, an amazing replication of vehicular life on the edge and in the dirt. *Challenge 2* picks up where the first *RalliSport* left off by taking both a more-is-better and a deeper-is-sweeter approach. New toys, such as a giant fleet of appealing rally rockets and even officially banned four-wheeled beasts like the Renault R5 Turbo and the Lancia Delta S4 from the infamous Group B category, join an expansive list of fresh, daunting locales to provide *Challenge 2* with plenty of sequel fodder and hardcore authority.

MOST EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LOVINGLY DESIGNED, BALANCED, AND POLISHED.

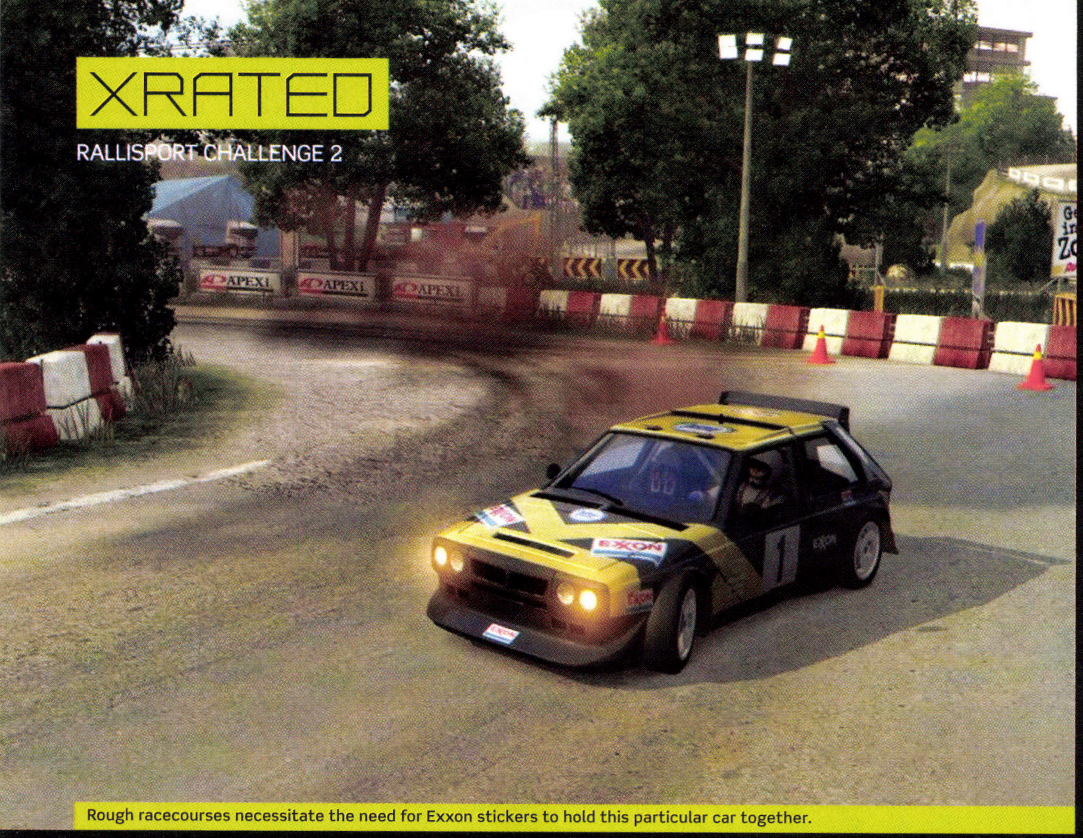
What's heartening about all this new content in *Challenge 2* is that most everything has been lovingly designed, balanced, and polished. Different regions now take on even greater characteristics; a new hill-climb series in Montegranito, Argentina, exemplifies this with its string of memorable love-to-hate-them hairpins, breathtaking waterfalls, and gorgeous vistas. Courses are also lengthier this time around, making the navigator-guided time attacks a welcome test of your endurance. And because you're essentially propelling your car through a physics-powered sandbox, environmental interaction is unpredictable and exhilarating. In *Challenge 2*, it's not about slamming

Cars are the natural enemy of the mud wrestler's mud pit.



XBOX LIVE

By Microsoft's decree, all racing games must be online enabled, which sounds very agreeable indeed. *RalliSport Challenge 2* lets up to four players go head-to-head in rally, hill-climb, rallycross, crossover, and ice-racing tournaments. Since it's the first racing title to properly support XSN, you'll have the ability to set up private (or public) tournaments, then track the results on the XSN website. But what impresses about the multiplayer modes here is that aside from a feast of Xbox Live options, the game also handles four-player splitscreen without a hitch. *Mario Kart Double Dash*? No thanks!



Rough racecourses necessitate the need for Exxon stickers to hold this particular car together.

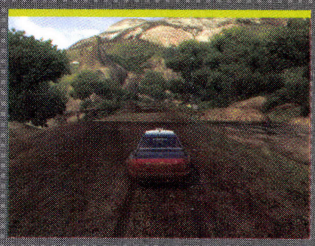
your Audi Quattro into a boulder, but rather how you slam into it—a last-minute weight shift could entirely alter the outcome of the collision. In an online game, full-contact racing becomes a constant source of nail-bitingly tense sessions, with up to four players gambling their leads in order to run one another off the side of the mountain. Ah, but not to worry, collisions can be turned off on Xbox Live if you're in the market for something with more finesse.

And that's basically the ticket. Despite developer DICE's lofty ambitions, *Challenge 2* never suffers from an identity crisis. Its controls feel just arcadey enough to take the frustration out of driving a real car, but without being condescending to veterans of the genre. In fact, its shockingly good visual effects—be they raindrops, snow accumulation, or simple patches of darkness—help the game attain a sort of hyperrealism whereby it ceases to simply imitate the world but instead replaces reality with its own consistent set of rules and aesthetics. All aspects of the game, from sights and sounds down to the tactile feedback of your controller rumbling, click so well in *Challenge 2* you hardly ever question its domain. Just don't let its sophistication scare you—at the end of the long, mud-splattered day, the game is above all else accessible and fun. //

Che Chou

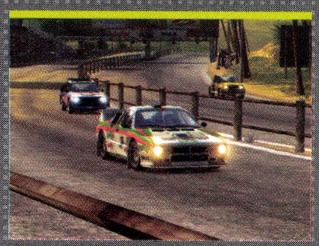
XBN 09 OUT OF TEN

BE A WINNER OF THE HUMAN RACE



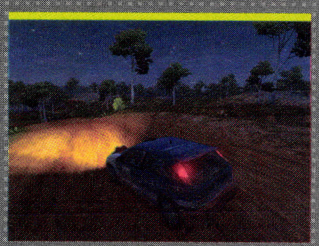
THE HILL CLIMB

The most challenging of the rally types in *RalliSport Challenge 2*, hill-climb races involve sprinting up and down enormous mountains in record time.



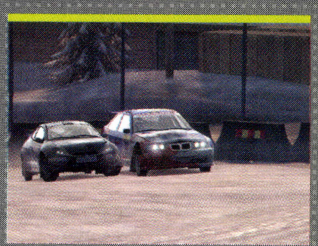
CROSSOVER

An interesting take on the traditional "rallycross" closed-circuit courses, crossover races pit cars on parallel tracks that "cross over" at a certain junction.



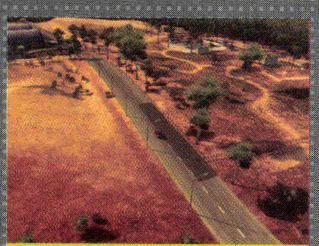
RALLY

Rally races are the standard point-A-to-point-B affair where you're usually accompanied by a co-pilot/navigator who warns you of upcoming turns with robotic precision.



ICE RACING

Ice races are self-explanatory. Due to the abundance of corners and a general lack of traction on these courses, ice race rings are generally pretty short—but fun!



FILE UNDER L: BATMAN: DARK TOMORROW

PUBLISHER: **Kemco** // DEVELOPER: **Kemco** // PLAYERS: **1** // LIVE: **No** // MSRP: **$9.99** // ESRB: **T**

Batdud's nocturnal remission...

What we said then: "[*Batman*] *Dark Tomorrow* is, in a word, abigheapingpileoffeces."

What we say now: At a glance, this game has terrible graphics, sloppy controls, and repetitive moves, but that doesn't set it apart from any of the other licensed fighting games that get put out every few hours.

What makes *Batman: Dark Tomorrow* special is the camera. It will flip behind you or to the side without warning, making even the simplest walk across a hallway an impossible challenge. When this happens, your Bat Controls™ become reversed, so until you memorize the exact location of each camera change, Batman will just dart back and forth. It should also be mentioned that he runs like a girl. And when you're dressed in a rubber suit and jumping in a circle like a woman, that's one Gloria Gaynor song away from a drag show.

You'd think Batman's prancing might confuse or even terrify Gotham's criminals, but you're not that lucky. While you're trying to decipher how to spaz your way in their direction, evil clowns are blasting you with lasers. And when you do make it over to them, the camera usually decides to zoom out to film your epic battle from several miles behind their backs. It's times like these when your Jumping Bat Attack™ is helpful—not as an offensive weapon, but as a way to find yourself in the distant swarm of ugly pixels. Most often, the only way you can tell you're winning a fight is to wait and see if your Bat Health Bar™ is going down at the same rhythm as the sound effects.

Tomorrow isn't all terrible button-mashing fights. There are other sequences, like traveling across rooftops on your Batline™. These are extra fun, since as you're inching along ledges, the Dark Knight plays practical jokes on you by throwing himself to his death and making you start over. However, Batman's sense of humor combined with the evil camera do create a unique videogame challenge: Every time you die, there's about a 20 percent chance it was your fault. // **Seanbaby**

Sadly, this room holds no small boys for Batman to adopt and dress in tights.

XTINCTION AGENDA

Character assassination made easy

NO. 3: GINA CAVALLI

Crimes against humanity: Cleavage in the first degree.
Appeared in: *R: Racing Evolution*

Gina Cavalli? It's nothing personal—in a better game, you'd be the greatest woman alive or polygonal. But no matter how much rendering time produced them, your mammaries can't carry an entire game on their own.

Someone at Namco thought, "Let's take the 'fun' and the 'arcade' and the 'racing' from the *Ridge Racer* series and keep the 'fine-looking CG' instead." *R: Racing Evolution* was born.

Evolution is not a fun game, nor an arcade game, nor much of a racer. It is more the mutant four-wheeled child of the tired *MotoGP* driving engine. But it sure has some fine-looking CG chicks.

There's a scene toward the beginning that's *Evolution* in a nutshell. Cavalli (the "evil" chick, as opposed to "good" driver Rena Hayami) is on the mic at a press conference. Where is the camera locked, for longer than even the most voyeuristic gamer would find comfortable? Hint: About 12 inches below where the media usually has the good taste to focus.

XTRA

OUT OF THE BOX

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099 The 50 Essential Xbox Games
103 5 Games You Can Live Without Peripherals Winners Need
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STUFF

Gotta get you some

1 SYSTEM SELECTOR PROPELICAN ACCESSORIES
$90; www.pelicanacc.com

If your electronic components outnumber the inputs on your TV set, check out Pelican's Lamborghini of electronics control devices, the System Selector Pro. Inside a full metal casing, you'll find eight AV/S-Video inputs, eight HDTV-compatible component inputs, three Ethernet inputs, three optical digital-audio inputs, and backlit interchangeable nameplates for everything from your Xbox to your video camera.

2 CANON POWERSHOT PRO1
$999; www.powershot.com

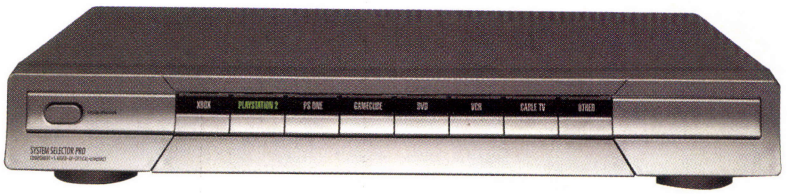
Wait, what? Eight megapixels for your amateur-photographer needs? That's right. Canon's new PowerShot Pro1 is a versatile, high-resolution digital camera offering top-tier features formerly found only on high-end, pro-level cameras. With the first L-series lens ever incorporated into a digital camera and a high-resolution movie mode that captures 640x480 30-second movies with 15 frames-per-second sound, go ahead, squeal in delight.

3 RED VS. BLUE
$20; www.redvsblue.com

Using *Halo*'s in-game engine and overdubbing voice and sound effects atop it (a technique known as Machinima), *Red vs. Blue* presents Master Chief and friends discussing love, loss, and the meaning of life in a series of short films. Hilarity ensues.

4 VOLVO S40 T5
$24,700; www.volvocars.com

Now is probably not the time to draw comparisons between Xbox and this turbocharged Volvo. But let's just say this: If Xbox 2 looks as good as this and performs as well, you'll all be very happy.



1

2

3

4

Reach More Than

840,000

Hardcore Xbox Gamers.

It stands to reason that Xbox gamers have other systems and the most hardcore Xbox gamers compare games from system to system. In order to really penetrate this marketplace of avid Xbox players, you have to hit them where they live: the pages of *EGM*, *GMR* and *Xbox Nation*. Put your titles at the epicenter of game purchasing with an ad message that speaks to the enthusiastic Xbox gamer. With 200,000 *Xbox Nation* readers, 42 percent Xbox ownership among *EGM*'s 600,000 readers, and 52 percent Xbox ownership among *GMR*'s 750,000 passionate shoppers, you are allowed an unparalleled reach into an incredible army of buyers. It's that unofficial legion of purchasers and influencers in *EGM*, *XBN* and *GMR* that will help you win the war when you launch your next Xbox titles.

These gamers are the building blocks for your success.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA
GAME GROUP

Now, there's one more thing in life you can count on. **Guaranteed Readers.**

	Primary Readers
COMPUTER GAMING WORLD	300,000
ELECTRONIC GAMING MONTHLY	600,000
Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine	350,000
GMR	750,000
XBN XBOX NATION	200,000

Bringing you the only sure thing in gaming with over 2 million core gamers a month.

Average rate bases will take effect with our September 2004 issues.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA™
GAME GROUP

Sell
915,000
Core PC Gamers on Your Next Title.

Your PC title flying off the shelves in Electronics Boutique in it's first few weeks can mean the difference between meeting expectations and breaking records. GMR is the PC and video game shopping guide for 750,000 EB customers. 82% are PC gamers, but [and this is a big but] they don't usually read PC gaming magazines. By breaking out of the typical marketing plan, you can combine Computer Gaming World's 300,000 readers with GMR and reach 915,000 hard core PC gamers—PC gamers who are ready, willing, and able to buy your product.

These gamers are the building blocks to your success.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA
GAME GROUP

Now, there's one more thing in life you can count on. **Guaranteed Readers.**

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Bringing you the only sure thing in gaming with over 2 million core gamers a month.

Average rate bases will take effect with our September 2004 issues.

ZIFF DAVIS MEDIA™
GAME GROUP

ESSENTIAL **SELECTION**

Xbox Nation picks the 50 best Xbox games to date

Halo

Dev.: Bungie Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Launch titles that rule, as well as season two of *Red vs. Blue*.

We don't like: Waiting around for a sequel.

10 OUT OF TEN

Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time

Dev.: Ubisoft Montreal Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Revisits that do justice to the originals.

We don't like: Being bum-rushed by demons you can't tell apart.

10 OUT OF TEN

Grand Theft Auto Double Pack

Dev.: Rockstar Vienna Pub.: Rockstar Games

We like: Two-for-one deals. Fingers on our hands. Straight thugging.

We don't like: Public outcry about declining morals in videogames.

10 OUT OF TEN

Steel Battalion

Dev.: Capcom Pub.: Capcom

We like: Innovation and unapologetically huge controllers.

We don't like: Not reaching the eject button in time and having saves wiped.

10 OUT OF TEN

Soul Calibur II

Dev.: Namco Pub.: Namco

We like: Finally getting our hands on a good, playable *Spawn*. Virtually, that is.

We don't like: Having to unlock Seung Mina and Sophitia.

9 OUT OF TEN

Ninja Gaiden

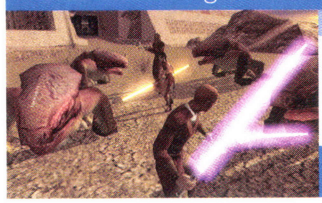
Dev.: Tecmo Pub.: Tecmo

We like: Reinvestigation of classic gameplay style with updated tech polish.

We don't like: Cameras which don't allow for adjustment during dicey moves.

9 OUT OF TEN

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic



Dev.: BioWare Pub.: Lucas Arts

We like: Choices that affect your appearance, and possible Jedidom.

We don't like: Occasional graphical glitches, but they're pretty minor.

9 OUT OF TEN

Breakdown

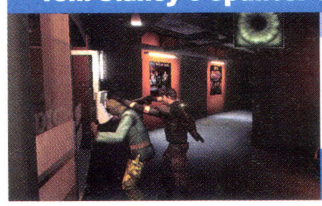
Dev.: Namco Pub.: Namco

We like: Flexing our long-unused *Punch-Out!* skills, this time in the proper setting.

We don't like: Amnesia as a plot device, no matter how effective it may be.

9 OUT OF TEN

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow



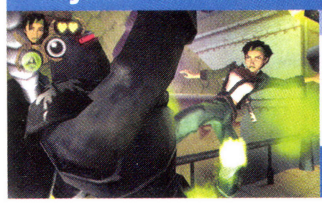
Dev.: Ubisoft Shanghai Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: An online component that doesn't feel like a half-assed afterthought.

We don't like: Getting busted by the randomizer, not our lack of skillz.

9 OUT OF TEN

Beyond Good & Evil



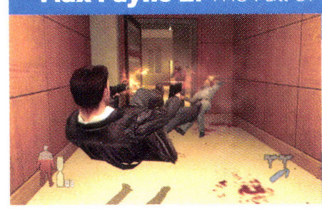
Dev.: Ubisoft Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Charm, grace, Rastafarian rhinoceroses, and photojournalists.

We don't like: Insta-Boss® brand final bosses and letdowns at the end.

9 OUT OF TEN

Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne



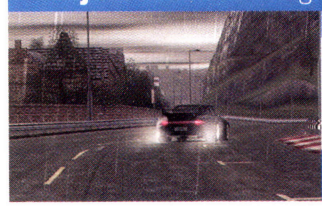
Dev.: Remedy Pub.: Rockstar Games

We like: Bullet time and hard-boiled stuff. You know, like eggs and cops.

We don't like: How quickly it's all over—although preferable to the alternative.

9 OUT OF TEN

Project Gotham Racing 2



Dev.: Bizarre Creations Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Seamless, sensible integration with Xbox Live, even in single player.

We don't like: Relentless A.I. opponents and strictly stock options for your ride.

9 OUT OF TEN

XTRA

ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The Sims: Bustin' Out

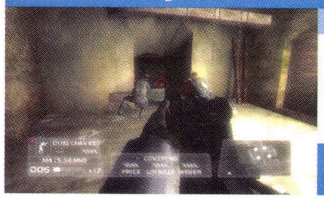
Dev.: Maxis Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: A so-called life that's more exciting and fun than our real lives.

We don't like: Watching an incontinent little computer person have an "accident."

9 OUT OF TEN

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3



Dev.: Ubisoft Montreal Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Realism in tactical shooters. Actually, the convincing illusion of reality.

We don't like: Being cussed at by 1337 h4x0rs two states away.

9 OUT OF TEN

FIFA Soccer 2004

Dev.: Electronic Arts Canada Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Electronic Arts finally coming through with a quality soccer game.

We don't like: The whole MS/EA snitfest. Get it together, fellas.

9 OUT OF TEN

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Dev.: Swingin' Ape Studios Pub.: Vivendi Universal

We like: Unrepentant cutesiness, as long as it's accompanied by good gameplay.

We don't like: No online support—not even a little.

9 OUT OF TEN

Fight Night 2004

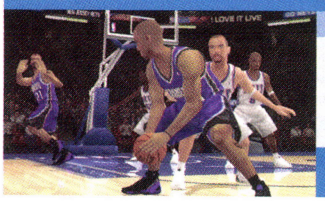
Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Being electronically dissuaded from ever stepping into a ring ourselves.

We don't like: Having to wait this long for a boxing game that's not a masher.

9 OUT OF TEN

NBA Live 2004



Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Developers who pay attention to little things. Like rubber bands.

We don't like: Not being able to take it out on the information superhighway.

9 OUT OF TEN

Need for Speed Underground

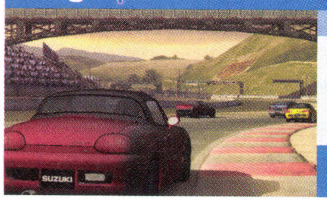
Dev.: Black Box Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Tweaking our rides out with endless options (Custom window tints? Sure. Electronic Bondo in action.) and not having to worry about five-oh.

We don't like: Quantum collisions, occasionally iffy framerates, and an endless supply of money. Bet you never thought you'd hear that, huh?

9 OUT OF TEN

Sega GT Online



Dev.: Wow Entertainment Pub.: Sega

We like: That it's 20 bucks and sports sick online tricks.

We don't like: That it's sort of an updated version of last year's game.

9 OUT OF TEN

SSX 3

Dev.: EA Sports Big Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Series that haven't started to suck. Quite the opposite, actually.

We don't like: Sounding like a broken record, but we'd really like SSX on Live.

9 OUT OF TEN

Top Spin

Dev.: Power and Magic Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Tennis games that are really RPGs in drag. Shh! Don't tell.

We don't like: Reading about tennis. Unless D.F. Wallace is doing the writing.

9 OUT OF TEN

Madden NFL 2004

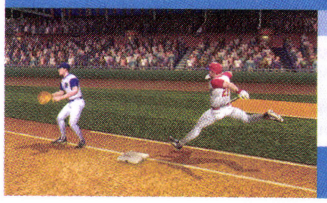
Dev.: Electronic Arts Tiburon Pub.: EA Sports

We like: Owner mode, because we're fond of keeping a close eye on margins.

We don't like: Wondering if EA and Microsoft will ever kiss and make up.

9 OUT OF TEN

MVP Baseball 2004



Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: EA Sports

We like: Venting our frustrations on scrubs like the Tulsa Drillers.

We don't like: Having to unlock vintage outfits—what's up with that?

9 OUT OF TEN

Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King

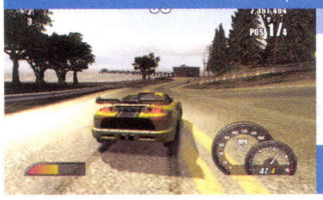
Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Cinematic and lavishly produced videogame excellence.

We don't like: Feeling like we're being talked down to.

9 OUT OF TEN

Burnout 2: Point of Impact



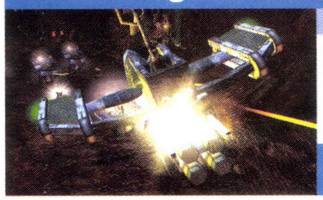
Dev.: Criterion Pub.: Acclaim

We like: Driving on the wrong side of the road—with no offense to Europeans.

We don't like: Burning through *Burnout* in a couple of days. And burns in general.

9 OUT OF TEN

Panzer Dragoon Orta



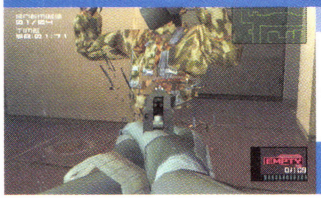
Dev.: Smilebit Pub.: Sega

We like: Being on rails—when the rails rule this much. Prequels don't hurt, either.

We don't like: Confined spaces with willful cameras and tough enemies.

9 OUT OF TEN

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance



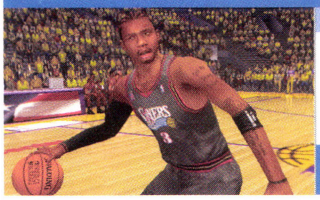
Dev.: Konami Pub.: Konami

We like: As much *Metal Gear* as we can get our grubby little meat hooks on.

We don't like: Slowdown that has no Earthly business in an Xbox game.

9 OUT OF TEN

NBA 2K2



Dev.: Visual Concepts Pub.: Sega

We like: Better passing, tattoos where they ought to be, and better textures.

We don't like: Being dunked upon frequently and successfully.

9 OUT OF TEN

Armed and Dangerous

Dev.: Planet Moon Studios Pub.: LucasArts

We like: Blowing stuff up, which everyone knows is catharsis at its finest.

We don't like: That damn mountain path.

8 OUT OF TEN

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon

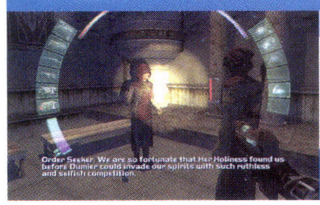
Dev.: Revolution Pub.: The Adventure Company

We like: Any videogame with the Knights Templar in it.

We don't like: Poverty, chastity, obedience.

8 OUT OF TEN

Deus Ex: Invisible War



Dev.: Ion Storm Pub.: Eidos

We like: Newtonian mechanics made flesh. And consequences. Sometimes.

We don't like: The idea of predestination.

8 OUT OF TEN

NBA Street Vol. 2

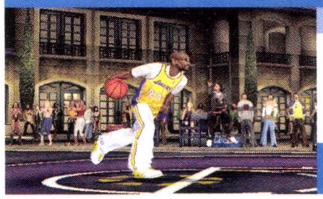
Dev.: Electronic Arts Canada Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Shammie-shams, heads or tails, cook 'ems, foie gras, and getting bent.

We don't like: Not being able to listen to ABBA or Morbid Angel while dunking.

9 OUT OF TEN

NBA Ballers



Dev.: Midway Pub.: Midway

We like: 1-on-1 matches in exotic locations with our dunking avatars.

We don't like: 1-on-0, 0-on-1, or 0-on-0 offline solitude.

9 OUT OF TEN

NASCAR Thunder 2004

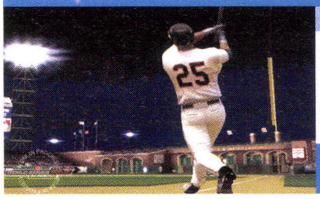
Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Adaptive (comparatively), intelligent opponents who hold grudges.

We don't like: Very many other NASCAR games.

9 OUT OF TEN

World Series Baseball 2K3



Dev.: Blue Shift Pub.: Sega

We like: Exhaustive research and attention to detail.

We don't like: A franchise mode that's detail-heavy to a fault.

9 OUT OF TEN

NFL 2K3

Dev.: Visual Concepts Pub.: Sega

We like: Talking smack to your buddies after a particularly punishing victory. Getting to see the week's highlights from games you may not have even played.

We don't like: Going without midgame saves or a playbook editor, and rushed point-and-clicking when under a two-minute deadline with no time-outs.

8 OUT OF TEN

Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind—Game of the Year Edition

Dev.: Bethesda Softworks Pub.: Bethesda Softworks

We like: More of what we liked the first time.

We don't like: Small improvements, but at least it's priced accordingly.

8 OUT OF TEN

XTRA

ESSENTIAL SELECTION

James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing

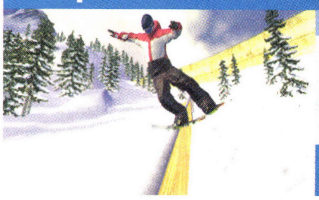
Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Faithful *Bond* action with classic henchmen and tight control.

We don't like: Funky camera acrobatics and inventory-system antics.

8 OUT OF TEN

Amped 2



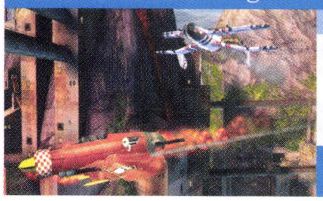
Dev.: Microsoft Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Swank online-enabled snowboarding while hunting snowmen.

We don't like: Rails and jumps that are still problematic and inconsistent.

8 OUT OF TEN

Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge



Dev.: FASA Studios Pub.: Microsoft

We like: The backstory, complete with epic proportions and so on.

We don't like: Being the equivalent of the mail-room guy in aerial combat.

8 OUT OF TEN

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

Dev.: Electronic Arts Pub.: Electronic Arts

We like: Enchanted jerseys of driving with a +5 against sand traps.

We don't like: Playing offline until the next one comes out (or perhaps forever).

8 OUT OF TEN

Otogi: Myth of Demons

Dev.: From Software Pub.: Sega

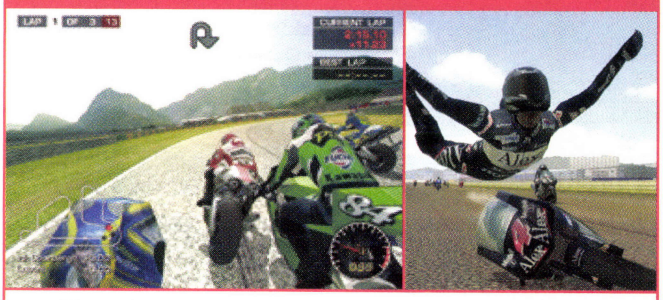
We like: Cameras that behave themselves, weapon selection up the wazoo, demons who die just so, and bosses that are as spectacular as they are tough.

We don't like: Working for Princess. No overtime, lousy pay, half-hour lunches. The hacking and slashing could get old if it weren't for the variety of demises.

8 OUT OF TEN

MotoGP 2

Dev.: Climax Pub.: THQ

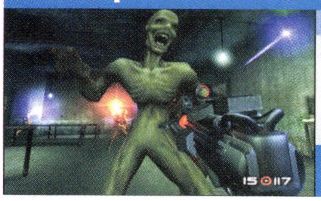


We like: Authenticity and believability in a motorcycle videogame, *Gran Turismo*-style.

We don't like: Unforgiving, if occasionally spectacular, physics and plain-old difficulty.

8 OUT OF TEN

TimeSplitters 2



Dev.: Free Radical Pub.: Eidos

We like: Ten levels of diverse environments and improved graphics.

We don't like: Being thrown into boss battles without warning, and opaque goals.

8 OUT OF TEN

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Dev.: Ubisoft Montreal Pub.: Ubisoft

We like: Ninjalike stealth with high-tech gadgetry and moral implications.

We don't like: Lackluster story lines, especially when approved by a headliner.

8 OUT OF TEN

RalliSport Challenge

Dev.: Digital Illusions Pub.: Microsoft

We like: Games that grow on you over time and are deep enough to replay.

We don't like: Blandness and delayed gratification in lieu of flashy presentation.

8 OUT OF TEN

Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II

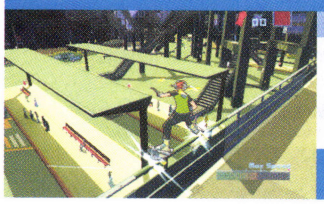
Dev.: Sonic Team Pub.: Sega

We like: Sonic Team's charm, free keyboard adapters, and multiplayer RPG-ing.

We don't like: Mandatory monthly fees in excess of what two burritos cost.

8 OUT OF TEN

Jet Set Radio Future



Dev.: Smilebit Pub.: Sega

We like: Ninety-degree grinds, revisited controls, and more leisure time for art.

We don't like: Cops and spray paint in an electrically fenced-in environment.

8 OUT OF TEN

Dance Dance Revolution Ultramix

Dev.: Konami Pub.: Konami

We like: Downloadable newness and comparing rug-cutting stats via Live.

We don't like: The thought of someone buying a videogame to lose weight.

8 OUT OF TEN

HOOKUPS

Need a little something extra? *Xbox Nation* recommends...

LOGITECH CORDLESS CONTROLLER

PRICE: $69.95
www.logitech.com

Logitech proclaims, "The Logitech Cordless Controller for Xbox is the controller you've been waiting for," and it's right, if you're one who pines for comfortable and well-made peripherals.

CONTROLLER S

PRICE: $29.95
www.xbox.com

Behold gaming perfection in the Controller S. This Microsoft offering replaces the unwieldy brick originally packaged with Xbox and is must-have for anyone with an Xbox and hands to play it.

MAD CATZ BLASTER

PRICE: $29.99
www.madcatz.com

When zombies come looking for sweet brain flesh, have the Blaster handy. It's got auto-fire capabilities, a built-in vibration function, and a rubber handgrip. Note: This works only on videogame zombies, stupid.

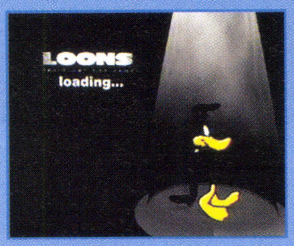
MAGIC BOX

PRICE: $24.90
www.lik-sang.com

The Magic Box seemingly has been produced by grand wizards who envisioned a world where Xbox owners could play their games with Dreamcast, Saturn, or PlayStation 2 controllers.

...BE AFRAID. BE VERY AFRAID

Five games that you should not, under any circumstances, pay for



LOONS: THE FIGHT FOR FAME

DEV.: WARTHOG PUB.: ATARI/INFOGRAMES

The first thing you'll notice about *Loons* is that the fights are frequently interrupted. For example, the game might start a video explaining how you should grab the spinning thing being pointed at by a bouncing green arrow. Luckily, you can't skip these. When you *are* allowed to play, *Loons* is almost fun, and you'll get true joy from using a pumpkin laser to make Bugs Bunny scream. However, if you make it through a level without a programming glitch teleporting you into a wall or freezing your Xbox, check again—you're probably not playing *Loons*.

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

DEV.: BLACK OPS PUB.: ATARI

The repetitive enemies and backgrounds might induce sleep, so the developers were smart enough to let your Arnold robot withstand 4,000 bullets before he dies, saving you from starting over when you wake up.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

DEV.: AKELLA PUB.: BETHESDA

This game is sort of the high-seas equivalent of a child being left in an insurance adjuster's office. The kid will occasionally find things he can interact with, but none of them are fun, and there are ghost pirates.

X-MEN: NEXT DIMENSION

DEV.: PARADOX PUB.: ACTIVISION

With so many fighting games being made, there are a lot that are dull, but *X-Men: Next Dimension* is so dull that it'll actually make X-Men-shaped ice-cream bars taste less delicious.

TAO FENG: FIST OF THE LOTUS

DEV.: STUDIO GIGANTE PUB.: MICROSOFT

Tao Feng's controls are so damn stiff and unresponsive that you'll swear your controller is either short-circuiting or haunted by poltergeists who suck at playing videogames.

PRIMA STRATEGY GUIDES
Scarab-collecting hints and game secrets judiciously impaled from Prima's *Official Ninja Gaiden Strategy Guide.*

TIPS AND TRICKS

Why? Because finding 50 scarabs is tough like Kevlar pasta.

NINJA GAIDEN

Tecmo Prisoners

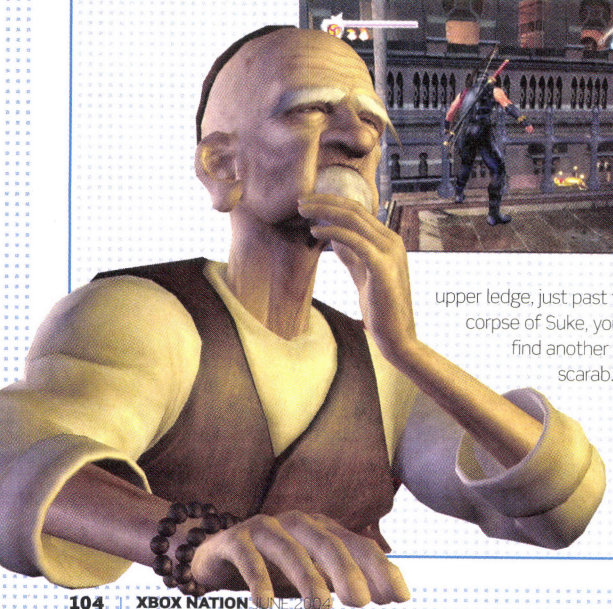
That *Ninja Gaiden*, eh? Reducing the hardest of hardcore gamers into whiny little snivelers complaining about "the difficulty," "the camera," and "the demon goo covering Rachel's chest in that cut-scene—why wasn't there more of that?" If you're asking these questions, prepare for disappointment. If, however, you're traipsing through the game on a scarab hunt, prepare for jubilation. Here are all 50 golden scarabs. All of them.

CHAPTER 3
SKIES OF VENGEANCE
TOTAL SCARABS: 3

Scarab 1 // There's a scarab on a cabinet in the corner of the captain's quarters, . **Scarab 2 //** The next is at the back of the living quarters, among the steel containers, between two chests at the back. **Scarab 3 //** Airship 3F. After killing the guards, climb the large metal box to one side. Reverse bird flip to the catwalk and search the back.

CHAPTER 4
IMPERIAL CITY INFILTRATION
TOTAL SCARABS: 3

Scarab 4 // After entering the Great Bridge section of the city (just past Muramasa's), you'll find a scarab in the fountain to the left. **Scarab 5 //** On the upper ledge, just past the corpse of Suke, you'll find another scarab.



Scarab 6 // Across from Han's Bar is an alleyway with a scarab at the back.

CHAPTER 5
CITY OF FIENDS
TOTAL SCARABS: 3

Scarab 7 // Find a gap near where you get the Key of Pegasus. Do a continuous wall run to reach a nook with a scarab. **Scarab 8 //** Just up Drawbridge Hill, you'll find a save point with a scarab next to it. **Scarab 9 //** Head to the road leading to the right of the save point and look for a small notch in the wall to Ryu's left with a scarab inside.

CHAPTER 6
THE MONASTERY
TOTAL SCARABS: 6

Scarab 10 // Shatter the glass display cases in the archive and collect the items, which include a golden scarab. **Scarab 11 //** In the archive, go to the back right corner and execute a flying bird jump to reach the balcony above and a scarab.

Scarab 12 // In the upper area overlooking the altar room, cross two beams to a chest on the left and a scarab nearby. **Scarab 13 //** Drop into the passage that's revealed after you put the Book of Eons on the altar and find a scarab nearby. **Scarab 14 //** After defeating some freakish flying creatures, leap across ledges to find a chest with a Life of the Gods, then leap to the left and up to an alcove to find a golden scarab. **Scarab 15 //** After fighting some hook-handed fiends at the bottom of the chamber, you'll find a scarab in a nook along the right wall of the next passageway.

CHAPTER 7
HIDDEN UNDERGROUND
TOTAL SCARABS: 4

Scarab 16 // You'll find a scarab at the bottom of the coffin chamber, in one of the slots lining the wall. **Scarab 17 //** In the chamber with the long suspension bridge, look to the right for another scarab. **Scarab 18 //** A scarab waits beneath the balcony that houses archers and a large blue eye on the wall. **Scarab 19 //** After grabbing the Bone Key, pass through the gate with the skull on it. Beyond that is a flooded chamber with a scarab at the bottom. Paddle down and snap it up.

CHAPTER 8
TAIRON UNDER ALERT
TOTAL SCARABS: 2

Scarab 20 // Use the Bone Key to unlock the gate with a skull on it and then grab the golden scarab. **Scarab 21 //** Bird flip to the third floor, then wall run to the left on the opposite wall to find a niche with a scarab.

THE OFFICIAL NINJA BOOK

Search for Real Ultimate Power on Amazon.com and you'll find a must-have book for any aspiring ninja. In the author's own words: "Hi, this book is all about ninjas, REAL NINJAS. This book is awesome. My name is Robert and I can't stop thinking about ninjas. These guys are cool; and by cool, I mean totally sweet."

CHAPTER 9

THE MILITARY SUPPLY BASE

TOTAL SCARABS: 4

Scarab 22 // Once you're out of the tunnel at the beginning of the level, look for a scarab to the left. **Scarab 23 //** Find the

train to Ryu's right. Go to the back on the left side and wall run up to the top. Use your attack to propel you and land on top. A scarab awaits. **Scarab 24 //** On the third level of the catwalks, approach a small guardroom. Execute a vertical wall run onto the roof for a golden scarab. **Scarab 25 //** Once the helicopter on the roof is defeated, find the pipes fenced in with mesh. Use the flying bird flip to climb up the gap between them to the top. A scarab is there.

CHAPTER 10

THE AQUEDUCT

TOTAL SCARABS: 9

Scarab 26 // After defeating the electric worm and grabbing the Art of the Inazuma, use a vertical wall run to grab the scarab on the ledge above the arch. **Scarab 27 //** In

the upper level of the Hall of Balance, pass the second chest and continue around the horseshoe to find another scarab. **Scarab 28 //** In the chamber with a grated floor and a pedestal, you'll find a scarab to one side of the grated floor. **Scarab 29 //** Go down the hole that emits a stream of bats. You'll find a scarab to the left of the cave path. **Scarab 30 //** After defeating the two electric worms, search their lair. A scarab awaits in one of the nests. **Scarab 31 //** In the chamber past the shop is a pool. Empty it and then hop down to claim a scarab. **Scarab 32 //** After you've

unlocked the door in the second hall and defeated the horde of fiends, perform a series of flying bird flips up the columns just to the right of where you enter the area. **Scarab 33 //** After entering the underground sanctuary, head through the doorway to the left to find a chest and a golden scarab. **Scarab 34 //** Use the root to swing and leap to a ledge. Search around to the left on that ledge to find a scarab.

CHAPTER 11

THE PATH TO ZARKHAN

TOTAL SCARABS: 5

Scarab 35 // At the beginning, plunge into the moat. Swim over and under the openings in the fence and gather the

scarab as you go. **Scarab 36 //** Past the chamber with the shop, you'll emerge in an open area with a golden scarab on a ledge of dry land. **Scarab 37 //** Look to the right immediately after you enter the area with a sunken ship. **Scarab 38 //** In the upper level of the ship and toward the back is a

scarab near an oxygen cylinder. **Scarab 39 //** In the room with the sarcophagus, swim to the ceiling to find a scarab.

CHAPTER 12

THE CAVERNS

TOTAL SCARABS: 8

Scarab 40 // Once you destroy Doku, enter the smaller chamber and find a scarab immediately to your left. **Scarab 41 //** Complete multiple platform jumps up the chamber you fought Doku in. Near

the archway, you'll see a platform close to the ground. Get to it with the continuous wall run, then vertical wall run to reach the

top of the arch and a scarab. **Scarab 42 //** On the upper rim of the stadium, run to the end for a chest and a scarab. **Scarab 43 //** Smash the stone heads near the ninja corpse holding the Zarkhan map to find another scarab. **Scarab 44 //** At Zarkhan Falls is a pool of water. Dive into the pool for a scarab at the bottom. **Scarab 45 //** In the fiery caves near the enormous seesaw, look down and to the right to spot a golden scarab. **Scarab 46 //** After gathering the Cog of Vigoor, go left to the save point and collect the scarab next to it. **Scarab 47 //** In the area with flames shooting out of the walls, find the junction with two blasts of fire. In an alcove to the left is a scarab.

Future Ninja

To unlock what may be the most sought-after notion in all of videogaming—namely, the confluence of robot and ninja—you must beat *Ninja Gaiden* on either the Normal or Hard difficulty setting. After completing the game, hold the L button and start a new game. Ryu will now be wearing his Ninja of the Future outfit, thereby giving players the cross-pollinating, dual-fetishizing ability to mix samurai swords with metallic power. What's next, chocolate sundaes and hot-oil massages? (No.)

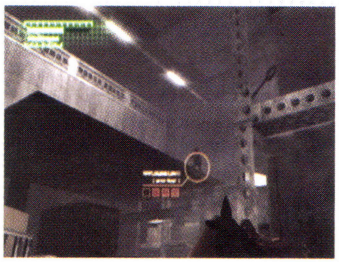
BREAKDOWN
Long before Namco's game of the same name, Hollywood had its own **Breakdown (1997)** starring Kurt Russell and JT Walsh. Fun Fact: Director Jonathan Mostow has since gone on to direct Matthew McConaughey vehicle **U-571 (2000)** and **Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines (2003).**

CHAPTER 14
VENGEFUL SPIRIT
TOTAL SCARABS: 2
Scarab 48 // In the labyrinth, open the Key of Lion door, go through it, and head to the left until you reach a dead end and a scarab. **Scarab 49 //** Once you've defeated the fish, follow the path as it twists to the right and then slopes downward. At the bottom, turn left, then take another quick left to find the penultimate scarab.

CHAPTER 15
THE CORE
TOTAL SCARABS: 1
Scarab 50 // When you exit the chamber where you placed the Devil, Deity of Immortality, go up the staircase and carefully walk off the edge to the left. You'll find the last scarab down below and to the right. Now, what do you do with 50 scarabs? Check the *Ninja Gaiden* code section and prepare to go back to a time when graphics were crappy, sound effects were atrocious, and gameplay ruled all.

BREAKDOWN
Punch. Kick. It's all in the game.

Well, the punching is, anyway. When you're stuck on the most difficult sections of *Breakdown*, what's the game plan? Cruise the tips below and ace this romp through industrial complexes.



CONTAINER TROUBLE //
In the deep-underground Site Zero lab, you'll need to fight your way through some large rooms where the enemy soldiers have an advantageous position. Just after the room with the first level 2 key-card reader is a room full of shipping containers on enormous racks. When you open the door, immediately bolt to the right around a stack of boxes and slip between the wall and the huge shelf with containers on it.

1 From here you can target the soldier on the platform to the left of the door. If Alex gets in your way, walk around the large container rack to the next row and fire from there.

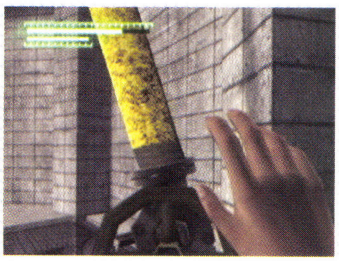
2 When the first target is down, rush across the room so you're behind a narrow stack of boxes under the platform near the forklift. Crouch to stay safe and then pop up to target and shoot the soldier atop the container rack. Crouch after a couple of shots, let him fire, and then pop up again to return fire.

3 You'll find a similar situation in the next room. Once the door opens, run to the left and head under the platform. Work your way back behind the containers and dispatch the soldier on ground level. Then rush across to cover on the other side. Pop out to take care of the enemies on the platform. Try to position yourself so only one of them can fire at you at a time; otherwise, you'll get cut down in the crossfire.

TIME SLIP //
1 After you meet with Glen Ogawa, the head scientist, he takes you along a couple of moving walkways. As you ride the first one, you'll see two white-suited technicians dart into a door at the other end. Remember that.

2 When you step off the second walkway and go through a door, Derrick time-slips and takes over another body. You can check out your new digs in the hallway mirror. When you reach the other door, you'll be back in time, watching Derrick, Glen, and Alex on the walkway.

3 To break the loop, go through the door at the end of the second walkway again. Run as fast as you can through the hall with the mirror, jamming around the corners. When you burst out into the moving-walkway hall, go to your left and keep running. You'll see another technician running for the door at the end of the first walkway. Follow him through to break the time-slip. It gets you back on track and into the correct body. If you miss it, try the whole process again.



PIPES PUZZLER //
A little while after dealing with the fake Alex visions, Solus sneaks up

SECOND WORST PLACE TO BREAK DOWN

Just after the **Sahara Desert** (less than three inches of rainfall per year and covering a vast area roughly the same size as the U.S.A.), **Beirut**, with its potpourri of militant extremist groups and religious zealotry, comes in a close second, making the rest of Lebanon seem like Club Med.

on you. You may be more powerful now, but you still can't harm him. Your only option is to run, which starts up a nasty little chase.

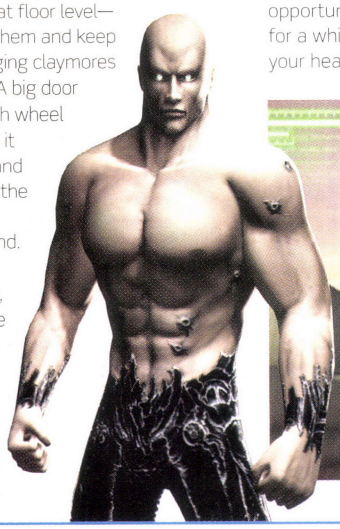
You need to run through the water works, find and shut off three pipe valves, avoid wall-mounted trip-wire mines, shoot enemy soldiers, and run from Solus. It's a handful.

1 The initial hallway takes you directly to the first pipe. It's a blue one in a large room with a grated floor. Race to it and access the valve to shut it off. Then go through the door farthest from the blue valve.

2 That hall leads directly to the red-pipe shutoff, which is guarded by three soldiers. If you have a rocket, use it. Otherwise, use your guard and rush them, taking them out from close quarters. Seal off the red pipe and get moving. Go through the other doorway in the red-pipe area.

3 You'll come to a four-way intersection with red arrow signs pointing to your right. Take their advice and go right, then right again at a T-intersection (watch for claymores). Have a weapon ready, because you'll emerge at the yellow-pipe room, which has a single soldier. Put him down and spin the yellow valve. Now turn around and go back the way you came; you need to get back to the four-way intersection. While you're spinning valve wheels, Solus may find you. If he's in your way, just try to dart past him.

4 Run straight across the four-way intersection. You'll see two claymores at floor level—jump over them and keep going, dodging claymores as you go. A big door with a hatch wheel awaits. Get it open fast and drop down the hole in the room beyond. If Solus is behind you, don't waste time gawking, just get down that hole.



CHOPPER CHALLENGE //

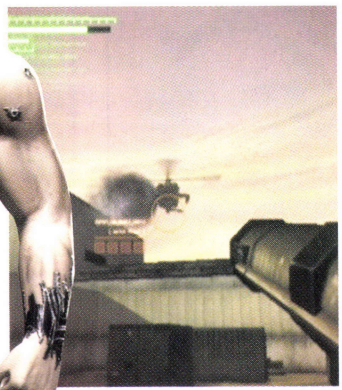
The freight yard is home to an attack helicopter. It's a bad mamma jamma that wants very badly to take you down. Since your T'langen powers are not going to help much, it will be up to your skill with a rocket launcher to foil the evil chopper.

1 Immediately upon entering the yard, head to the platform to the left. You can duck under it for cover and to collect rocket packs. Fill up your launcher and then dodge out to confront your enemy. One thing: The platform isn't perfect cover. Stay in the middle if you want to avoid all damage. The chopper's missiles can harm you if you're near the edges of the platform.

2 The first shot is the easiest, since the pilot doesn't yet know you have antiaircraft weapons. Wait for the heli to pause in flight and take aim at you. Fire a missile and watch it hit home. After that, you need to take your time and wait for the right shot, which means a time when the helicopter will be hovering long enough for your missile to reach it, or when the pilot is coming right at you, allowing you to score a hit.

3 The containers are invaluable as cover during this fight. Dodge behind them, keeping the helicopter in sight to make sure a container stays between the two of you. Stay close to the metal boxes; if the chopper lets off a volley of missiles, you'll need to press close to the container to avoid damage. Even then, there's a good chance you'll take some heat.

Be patient and wait for your opportunities. This fight can go on for a while, so play it safe to conserve your health.



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

I am Sam

Who's king of the stealth-action throne? No, not Sydney Bristow from *Alias*. Heck, not even Solid "Dave" Snake. We're talking about everyone's favorite gravel-toned special operations hunter-killer, Sam Fisher. Time to try some of the more cunning tactics allowed in the game...

SUBMARINE SANDWICH

Shooting a bullet inside a submarine usually gets you explosive results, complete with rampant depressurization and a watery demise. With that in mind, entering stealth mode without your finger on the trigger sounds like a good plan in Sadono's submarine.

1 As you move through the vessel, isolate and contain. You can't afford to alert more than a single guard at a time, so wait for your attacks at blind corners or when you find a guard alone (such as in the barracks or kitchen). Hide near a tight corner, and when a guard advances on your position, swing out and connect with a fist to the face. This will usually drop your opponent in one bone-crushing thud. If you're really talented, you can even slip out of the shadows and perform a quick grab to remove a threat.

2 When you can't pummel your opponent, fire the sticky shocker to incapacitate him. Also, the diversion camera works great for knocking out foes who are around corners. In a pinch, you can blast off a ring-airfoil round to daze someone (though you have to hit them square in the head).

WHISTLE WHILE YOU WORK

Usually, your whistle precedes a punch to the enemy's skull or a bullet to his brain. In nonlethal situations, or particularly dangerous ones when you can't seem to break through the guards' patrol patterns, you might want to play the bad guys a show tune.

1 From the nearby shadows, whistle at the closest patrolling guard. The guard will break from his patrol pattern to investigate. If you've placed yourself in the best position, the shadow coverage should allow you to bypass the guard as he circles out to where he first heard the whistle. You don't even have to fire a shot.

2 In the Jerusalem street market, whistle diversions can fool the police time and time again. You can lure the first and second police officers down the side streets near the insertion point. This technique proves essential on the group of officers past the blue stained-glass church. You can trick these police officers into the alley behind the church and circle around quickly to the abandoned main street or slug it out with them one by one in the alley's quiet darkness.

CODE-X

When skill is no longer an option

Whether you're stepping up to the plate and tonking a ball, gawking at that cut-scene involving demon hunter Rachel's breasts covered in demonic spooge, or desperately avoiding a prison-style shanking from a mutant with flesh bagpipes attached to its back, *XBN* has masses of codeage to satiate your *MVP Baseball 2004*/*Ninja Gaiden*/*The Suffering* hunger. Suck them down.

NINJA GAIDEN

XBN has officially pillaged Ryu Hayabusa's ninja caper of all its secrets. Details on costume changes, all the hidden weapons, and what to do with all those scarabs you've collected are included below.

NINJA TRAINING OUTFIT
Highlight New Game at the Main menu, hold both trigger buttons, and press A.
ARMLET OF BENEDICTION
Collect 15 scarabs.
DABILAHRO
Collect 20 scarabs.
ARMLET OF FORTUNE
Collect 30 scarabs.
ARMLET OF TRANQUILITY
Collect 40 scarabs.
NINJA GAIDEN 1
Collect 50 scarabs.
NINJA GAIDEN 2
Once you obtain the original *Ninja Gaiden*, shoot the clock tower near Muramasa's shop in Tairon.
NINJA GAIDEN 3
In the ceremonial room in the aqueducts, jump up the wall where you found the golden scarab.
DARK DRAGON BLADE
Complete the game, then visit Muramasa's shop in Chapter 13.
KITETSU
Defeat Doku at the end of Chapter 11. (Be careful, it will drain your health if you are not wearing the Armlet of Tranquility.)
UNLABORED FLAWLESSNESS
Upgrade the wooden sword to level seven.

WINDMILL SHURIKEN
This is located in a narrow alleyway down the street from Han's Bar.
EVIL RYU
Complete the game on Very Hard difficulty.
FUTURE NINJA SUIT AND PLASMA SWORD
Once you complete the game, highlight New Game, hold L, and press A.
ALL MUSIC AND SOUND TEST
Complete the game.

THE SUFFERING

Swearing. Violence. More swearing. And monsters with fleshy bagpipe autocannons protruding from their backs. That can only be one game: *Mary-Kate and Ashley: Sweet 16—License to Drive*. No? Actually, it's *The Suffering*, and *XBN* has been traumatized into unearthing a special prelude level and a host of other pants-wetting secrets.

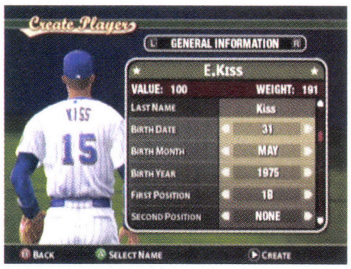
PRELUDE LEVEL
Complete the game, then begin a new one.
ALTERNATE TITLE SEQUENCE
Complete the game.
DIRECTOR COMMENTARY
In the prelude level, wait for a crow to land next to the three inmates, then stand on top of the crow.

MONSTER ARCHIVES
Use your monster transformation for the majority of the game and complete the game.

TORQUE ARCHIVES
Make bad decisions and beat the game.
TORQUE'S FAMILY ARCHIVES
Make good decisions and beat the game.

MVP BASEBALL 2004

Don't fancy stepping a precreated steroid-pumping behemoth up to the plate? Then start your MVP point collecting and unlock baseball legends.



WORST PLAYER EVER!
Enter Erik Kiss as a player name

AL KALINE
2,500 MVP points

ANAHEIM ANGELS 1986 JERSEYS
250 MVP points

ASTRODOME
2,500 MVP points

ATLANTA BRAVES 1974 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

BABE RUTH
5,000 MVP points

BALTIMORE ORIOLES 1971 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

BILLY WILLIAMS
2,500 MVP points

BOB FELLER
3,500 MVP points

BOB GIBSON
4,500 MVP points

BOB LEMON
3,000 MVP points

BOSTON RED SOX 1903 JERSEYS
1,000 MVP points

BROOKLYN DODGERS 1941 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

BROOKS ROBINSON
3,500 MVP points

CATFISH HUNTER
3,000 MVP points

CHICAGO CUBS 1954 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

CHICAGO WHITE SOX 1919 JERSEYS
1,000 MVP points

CINCINNATI REDS 1970 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

CLEVELAND INDIANS 1975 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

CROSLEY FIELD
2,500 MVP points

CY YOUNG
4,500 MVP points

DETROIT TIGERS 1906 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

EARLY WYNN
3,500 MVP points

EDDIE MATHEWS
4,000 MVP points

FERGUSON JENKINS
2,500 MVP points

FORBES FIELD
5,000 MVP points

GAYLORD PERRY
3,500 MVP points

GRIFFITH STADIUM
3,000 MVP points

HAL NEWHOUSER
2,500 MVP points

HARMON KILLEBREW
3,500 MVP points

HONUS WAGNER
4,500 MVP points

HOUSTON ASTROS 1986 JERSEYS
250 MVP points

HOYT WILHELM
3,000 MVP points

JACKIE ROBINSON
5,000 MVP points

JIM PALMER
4,000 MVP points

JIMMIE FOXX
4,000 MVP points

JOE MORGAN
4,000 MVP points

JUAN MARICHAL
3,500 MVP points

KANSAS CITY ROYALS 1985 JERSEYS
250 MVP points

LARRY DOBY
3,000 MVP points

LOU BROCK
3,000 MVP points

LOU GEHRIG
4,500 MVP points

LUIS APARICIO
3,000 MVP points

MEL OTT
3,500 MVP points

MIKE SCHMIDT
4,000 MVP points

MILWAUKEE BREWERS 1982 JERSEYS
250 MVP points

MINNESOTA TWINS 1977 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

MONTREAL EXPOS 1981 JERSEYS
350 MVP points

NEW YORK GIANTS 1954 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

NEW YORK METS 1986 JERSEYS
350 MVP points

NEW YORK YANKEES 1927 JERSEYS
1,000 MVP points

NOLAN RYAN
4,500 MVP points

OAKLAND ATHLETICS 1972 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

ORLANDO CEPEDA
3,500 MVP points

PEE WEE REESE
3,500 MVP points

PHIL NIEKRO
2,500 MVP points

PHIL RIZZUTO
3,000 MVP points

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES 1980 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

PITTSBURGH PIRATES 1916 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

PITTSBURGH PIRATES 1979 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

RALPH KINER
2,500 MVP points

REGGIE JACKSON
4,500 MVP points

RICHIE ASHBURN
2,500 MVP points

ROBIN ROBERTS
2,500 MVP points

ROBIN YOUNT
4,000 MVP points

ROD CAREW
3,500 MVP points

ROLLIE FINGERS
3,500 MVP points

ROY CAMPANELLA
4,500 MVP points

SAN DIEGO PADRES 1984 JERSEYS
350 MVP points

SATCHEL PAIGE
4,500 MVP points

SEATTLE MARINERS 1981 JERSEYS
350 MVP points

SHIBE PARK STADIUM
4,000 MVP points

SPARKY ANDERSON
4,500 MVP points

SPORTSMAN'S PARK
4,000 MVP points

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS 1934 JERSEYS
750 MVP points

TEXAS RANGERS 1976 JERSEYS
500 MVP points

THE POLO GROUNDS
5,000 MVP points

TIGER STADIUM
3,000 MVP points

TOM SEAVER
4,000 MVP points

TOMMY LASORDA
4,500 MVP points

TORONTO BLUE JAYS 1992 JERSEYS
250 MVP points

TY COBB
5,000 MVP points

WALTER JOHNSON
4,500 MVP points

WARREN SPAHN
4,000 MVP points

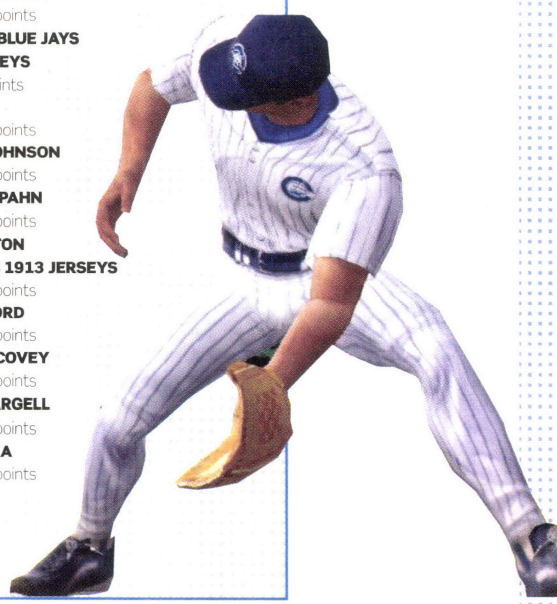
WASHINGTON SENATORS 1913 JERSEYS
1,000 MVP points

WHITEY FORD
3,500 MVP points

WILLIE MCCOVEY
4,500 MVP points

WILLIE STARGELL
4,000 MVP points

YOGI BERRA
4,500 MVP points



Prima: now more than ever

Prima games is our helpful partner in bringing you this section because, frankly, we've got better things to do than sit around all day testing codes. They don't do the Stuff bit, the Essential Selection thingies, or the amusing little bits that run along the tops of the pages. But they do a fine job of providing you with first-class tips and tricks for the games you're playing as we speak. Thanks, Prima!

EXIT

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